

**King John
and
Henry VIII**

William Shakespeare

**Edited by
David Bevington
and
David Scott Kastan**

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

King John

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KING JOHN

Edited with a Commentary by

ROBERT SMALLWOOD

and with an Introduction by

EUGENE GIDDENS

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KING JOHN

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General Introduction

Every play by Shakespeare is unique. This is part of his greatness. A restless and indefatigable experimenter, he moved with a rare amalgamation of artistic integrity and dedicated professionalism from one kind of drama to another. Never shackled by convention, he offered his actors the alternation between serious and comic modes from play to play, and often also within the plays themselves, that the repertory system within which he worked demanded, and which provided an invaluable stimulus to his imagination. Introductions to individual works in this series attempt to define their individuality. But there are common factors that underpin Shakespeare's career.

Nothing in his heredity offers clues to the origins of his genius. His upbringing in Stratford-upon-Avon, where he was born in 1564, was unexceptional. His mother, born Mary Arden, came from a prosperous farming family. Her father chose her as his executor over her eight sisters and his four stepchildren when she was only in her late teens, which suggests that she was of more than average practical ability. Her husband John, a glover, apparently unable to write, was nevertheless a capable businessman and loyal townsfellow, who seems to have fallen on relatively hard times in later life. He would have been brought up as a Catholic, and may have retained Catholic sympathies, but his son subscribed publicly to Anglicanism throughout his life.

The most important formative influence on Shakespeare was his school. As the son of an alderman who became bailiff (or mayor) in 1568, he had the right to attend the town's grammar school. Here he would have received an education grounded in classical rhetoric and oratory, studying authors such as Ovid, Cicero and Quintilian, and would have been required to read, speak, write and even think in Latin from his early years. This classical education permeates Shakespeare's work from the beginning to the end of his career. It is apparent in the self-conscious classicism of plays of the early 1590s such as the tragedy of *Titus Andronicus*, *The Comedy of Errors*, and the narrative poems *Venus and Adonis* (1592–3) and *The Rape of Lucrece*

(1593–4), and is still evident in his latest plays, informing the dream visions of *Pericles* and *Cymbeline* and the masque in *The Tempest*, written between 1607 and 1611. It inflects his literary style throughout his career. In his earliest writings the verse, based on the ten-syllabled, five-beat iambic pentameter, is highly patterned. Rhetorical devices deriving from classical literature, such as alliteration and antithesis, extended similes and elaborate wordplay, abound. Often, as in *Love's Labour's Lost* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, he uses rhyming patterns associated with lyric poetry, each line self-contained in sense, the prose as well as the verse employing elaborate figures of speech. Writing at a time of linguistic ferment, Shakespeare frequently imports Latinisms into English, coining words such as abstemious, addiction, incarnadine and adjunct. He was also heavily influenced by the eloquent translations of the Bible in both the Bishops' and the Geneva versions. As his experience grows, his verse and prose become more supple, the patterning less apparent, more ready to accommodate the rhythms of ordinary speech, more colloquial in diction, as in the speeches of the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*, the characterful prose of Falstaff and Hamlet's soliloquies. The effect is of increasing psychological realism, reaching its greatest heights in *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. Gradually he discovered ways of adapting the regular beat of the pentameter to make it an infinitely flexible instrument for matching thought with feeling. Towards the end of his career, in plays such as *The Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest*, he adopts a more highly mannered style, in keeping with the more overtly symbolical and emblematical mode in which he is writing.

So far as we know, Shakespeare lived in Stratford till after his marriage to Anne Hathaway, eight years his senior, in 1582. They had three children: a daughter, Susanna, born in 1583 within six months of their marriage, and twins, Hamnet and Judith, born in 1585. The next seven years of Shakespeare's life are virtually a blank. Theories that he may have been, for instance, a schoolmaster, or a lawyer, or a soldier, or a sailor, lack evidence to support them. The first reference to him in print, in Robert Greene's pamphlet *Greene's Groatsworth of Wit* of 1592, parodies a line from *Henry VI, Part III*, implying that Shakespeare was already an established playwright. It seems likely that at some unknown point after the birth of his twins he joined a theatre company and gained experience as both actor and writer in the provinces and London. The London theatres closed because of plague in 1593 and 1594; and during these years, perhaps recognizing

the need for an alternative career, he wrote and published the narrative poems *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*. These are the only works we can be certain that Shakespeare himself was responsible for putting into print. Each bears the author's dedication to Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton (1573–1624), the second in warmer terms than the first. Southampton, younger than Shakespeare by ten years, is the only person to whom he personally dedicated works. The Earl may have been a close friend, perhaps even the beautiful and adored young man whom Shakespeare celebrates in his *Sonnets*.

The resumption of playing after the plague years saw the founding of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, a company to which Shakespeare was to belong for the rest of his career, as actor, shareholder and playwright. No other dramatist of the period had so stable a relationship with a single company. Shakespeare knew the actors for whom he was writing and the conditions in which they performed. The permanent company was made up of around twelve to fourteen players, but one actor often played more than one role in a play and additional actors were hired as needed. Led by the tragedian Richard Burbage (1568–1619) and, initially, the comic actor Will Kemp (d. 1603), they rapidly achieved a high reputation, and when King James I succeeded Queen Elizabeth I in 1603 they were renamed as the King's Men. All the women's parts were played by boys; there is no evidence that any female role was ever played by a male actor over the age of about eighteen. Shakespeare had enough confidence in his boys to write for them long and demanding roles such as Rosalind (who, like other heroines of the romantic comedies, is disguised as a boy for much of the action) in *As You Like It*, Lady Macbeth and Cleopatra. But there are far more fathers than mothers, sons than daughters, in his plays, few if any of which require more than the company's normal complement of three or four boys.

The company played primarily in London's public playhouses – there were almost none that we know of in the rest of the country – initially in the Theatre, built in Shoreditch in 1576, and from 1599 in the Globe, on Bankside. These were wooden, more or less circular structures, open to the air, with a thrust stage surmounted by a canopy and jutting into the area where spectators who paid one penny stood, and surrounded by galleries where it was possible to be seated on payment of an additional penny. Though properties such as cauldrons, stocks, artificial trees or beds could indicate locality, there was no representational scenery. Sound effects such as flourishes of

trumpets, music both martial and amorous, and accompaniments to songs were provided by the company's musicians. Actors entered through doors in the back wall of the stage. Above it was a balconied area that could represent the walls of a town (as in *King John*), or a castle (as in *Richard II*), and indeed a balcony (as in *Romeo and Juliet*). In 1609 the company also acquired the use of the Blackfriars, a smaller, indoor theatre to which admission was more expensive, and which permitted the use of more spectacular stage effects such as the descent of Jupiter on an eagle in *Cymbeline* and of goddesses in *The Tempest*. And they would frequently perform before the court in royal residences and, on their regular tours into the provinces, in non-theatrical spaces such as inns, guildhalls and the great halls of country houses.

Early in his career Shakespeare may have worked in collaboration, perhaps with Thomas Nashe (1567–c. 1601) in *Henry VI, Part I* and with George Peele (1556–96) in *Titus Andronicus*. And towards the end he collaborated with George Wilkins (fl. 1604–8) in *Pericles*, and with his younger colleagues Thomas Middleton (1580–1627), in *Timon of Athens*, and John Fletcher (1579–1625), in *Henry VIII, The Two Noble Kinsmen* and the lost play *Cardenio*. Shakespeare's output dwindled in his last years, and he died in 1616 in Stratford, where he owned a fine house, New Place, and much land. His only son had died at the age of eleven, in 1596, and his last descendant died in 1670. New Place was destroyed in the eighteenth century but the other Stratford houses associated with his life are maintained and displayed to the public by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust.

One of the most remarkable features of Shakespeare's plays is their intellectual and emotional scope. They span a great range from the lightest of comedies, such as *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *The Comedy of Errors*, to the profoundest of tragedies, such as *King Lear* and *Macbeth*. He maintained an output of around two plays a year, ringing the changes between comic and serious. All his comedies have serious elements: Shylock, in *The Merchant of Venice*, almost reaches tragic dimensions, and *Measure for Measure* is profoundly serious in its examination of moral problems. Equally, none of his tragedies is without humour: Hamlet is as witty as any of his comic heroes, *Macbeth* has its Porter, and *King Lear* its Fool. His greatest comic character, Falstaff, inhabits the history plays and *Henry V* ends with a marriage, while *Henry VI, Part III*, *Richard II* and *Richard III* culminate in the tragic deaths of their protagonists.

Although in performance Shakespeare's characters can give the

impression of a superabundant reality, he is not a naturalistic dramatist. None of his plays is explicitly set in his own time. The action of few of them (except for the English histories) is set even partly in England (exceptions are *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and the Induction to *The Taming of the Shrew*). Italy is his favoured location. Most of his principal story-lines derive from printed writings; but the structuring and translation of these narratives into dramatic terms is Shakespeare's own, and he invents much additional material. Most of the plays contain elements of myth and legend, and many derive from ancient or more recent history or from romantic tales of ancient times and faraway places. All reflect his reading, often in close detail. Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1577, revised 1587), a great compendium of English, Scottish and Irish history, provided material for his English history plays. The *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans* by the Greek writer Plutarch, finely translated into English from the French by Sir Thomas North in 1579, provided much of the narrative material, and also a mass of verbal detail, for his plays about Roman history. Some plays are closely based on shorter individual works: *As You Like It*, for instance, on the novel *Rosalynde* (1590) by his near-contemporary Thomas Lodge (1558–1625), *The Winter's Tale* on *Pandosto* (1588) by his old rival Robert Greene (1558–92) and *Othello* on a story by the Italian Giraldi Cinthio (1504–73). And the language of his plays is permeated by the Bible, the Book of Common Prayer and the proverbial sayings of his day.

Shakespeare was popular with his contemporaries, but his commitment to the theatre and to the plays in performance is demonstrated by the fact that only about half of his plays appeared in print in his lifetime, in slim paperback volumes known as quartos, so called because they were made from printers' sheets folded twice to form four leaves (eight pages). None of them shows any sign that he was involved in their publication. For him, performance was the primary means of publication. The most frequently reprinted of his works were the non-dramatic poems – the erotic *Venus and Adonis* and the more moralistic *The Rape of Lucrece*. The *Sonnets*, which appeared in 1609, under his name but possibly without his consent, were less successful, perhaps because the vogue for sonnet sequences, which peaked in the 1590s, had passed by then. They were not reprinted until 1640, and then only in garbled form along with poems by other writers. Happily, in 1623, seven years after he died, his colleagues John Heminges (1556–1630) and Henry Condell (d. 1627) published his collected plays, including eighteen that had not previously

appeared in print, in the first Folio, whose name derives from the fact that the printers' sheets were folded only once to produce two leaves (four pages). Some of the quarto editions are badly printed, and the fact that some plays exist in two, or even three, early versions creates problems for editors. These are discussed in the Account of the Text in each volume of this series.

Shakespeare's plays continued in the repertoire until the Puritans closed the theatres in 1642. When performances resumed after the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660 many of the plays were not to the taste of the times, especially because their mingling of genres and failure to meet the requirements of poetic justice offended against the dictates of neoclassicism. Some, such as *The Tempest* (changed by John Dryden and William Davenant in 1667 to suit contemporary taste), *King Lear* (to which Nahum Tate gave a happy ending in 1681) and *Richard III* (heavily adapted by Colley Cibber in 1700 as a vehicle for his own talents), were extensively rewritten; others fell into neglect. Slowly they regained their place in the repertoire, and they continued to be reprinted, but it was not until the great actor David Garrick (1717–79) organized a spectacular jubilee in Stratford in 1769 that Shakespeare began to be regarded as a transcendental genius. Garrick's idolatry prefigured the enthusiasm of critics such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834) and William Hazlitt (1778–1830). Gradually Shakespeare's reputation spread abroad, to Germany, America, France and to other European countries.

During the nineteenth century, though the plays were generally still performed in heavily adapted or abbreviated versions, a large body of scholarship and criticism began to amass. Partly as a result of a general swing in education away from the teaching of Greek and Roman texts and towards literature written in English, Shakespeare became the object of intensive study in schools and universities. In the theatre, important turning points were the work in England of two theatre directors, William Poel (1852–1934) and his disciple Harley Granville-Barker (1877–1946), who showed that the application of knowledge, some of it newly acquired, of early staging conditions to performance of the plays could render the original texts viable in terms of the modern theatre. During the twentieth century appreciation of Shakespeare's work, encouraged by the availability of audio, film and video versions of the plays, spread around the world to such an extent that he can now be claimed as a global author.

The influence of Shakespeare's works permeates the English language. Phrases from his plays and poems – 'a tower of strength',

‘green-eyed jealousy’, ‘a foregone conclusion’ – are on the lips of people who may never have read him. They have inspired composers of songs, orchestral music and operas; painters and sculptors; poets, novelists and film-makers. Allusions to him appear in pop songs, in advertisements and in television shows. Some of his characters – Romeo and Juliet, Falstaff, Shylock and Hamlet – have acquired mythic status. He is valued for his humanity, his psychological insight, his wit and humour, his lyricism, his mastery of language, his ability to excite, surprise, move and, in the widest sense of the word, entertain audiences. He is the greatest of poets, but he is essentially a dramatic poet. Though his plays have much to offer to readers, they exist fully only in performance. In these volumes we offer individual introductions, notes on language and on specific points of the text, suggestions for further reading and information about how each work has been edited. In addition we include accounts of the ways in which successive generations of interpreters and audiences have responded to challenges and rewards offered by the plays. The Penguin Shakespeare series aspires to remove obstacles to understanding and to make pleasurable the reading of the work of the man who has done more than most to make us understand what it is to be human.

Stanley Wells

The Chronology of Shakespeare's Works

A few of Shakespeare's writings can be fairly precisely dated. An allusion to the Earl of Essex in the chorus to Act V of *Henry V*, for instance, could only have been written in 1599. But for many of the plays we have only vague information, such as the date of publication, which may have occurred long after composition, the date of a performance, which may not have been the first, or a list in Francis Meres's book *Palladis Tamia*, published in 1598, which tells us only that the plays listed there must have been written by that year. The chronology of the early plays is particularly difficult to establish. Not everyone would agree that the first part of *Henry VI* was written after the third, for instance, or *Romeo and Juliet* before *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The following table is based on the 'Canon and Chronology' section in *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion*, by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, with John Jowett and William Montgomery (1987), where more detailed information and discussion may be found.

<i>The Two Gentlemen of Verona</i>	1590–91
<i>The Taming of the Shrew</i>	1590–91
<i>Henry VI, Part II</i>	1591
<i>Henry VI, Part III</i>	1591
<i>Henry VI, Part I</i> (perhaps with Thomas Nashe)	1592
<i>Titus Andronicus</i> (perhaps with George Peele)	1592
<i>Richard III</i>	1592–3
<i>Venus and Adonis</i> (poem)	1592–3
<i>The Rape of Lucrece</i> (poem)	1593–4
<i>The Comedy of Errors</i>	1594
<i>Love's Labour's Lost</i>	1594–5
<i>Edward III</i> (authorship uncertain, not included in later editions)	1595 (printed in 1596)
<i>Richard II</i>	1595
<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>	1595
<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>	1595
<i>King John</i>	1596
<i>The Merchant of Venice</i>	1596–7
<i>Henry IV, Part I</i>	1596–7
<i>The Merry Wives of Windsor</i>	1597–8
<i>Henry IV, Part II</i>	1597–8
<i>Much Ado About Nothing</i>	1598
<i>Henry V</i>	1598–9
<i>Julius Caesar</i>	1599

<i>As You Like It</i>	1599–1600
<i>Hamlet</i>	1600–1601
<i>Twelfth Night</i>	1600–1601
‘The Phoenix and the Turtle’ (poem)	by 1601
<i>Troilus and Cressida</i>	1602
<i>The Sonnets</i> (poems)	1593–1603 and later
<i>Measure for Measure</i>	1603
<i>A Lover’s Complaint</i> (poem)	1603–4
<i>Sir Thomas More</i> (in part, not included in this set)	1603–4
<i>Othello</i>	1603–4
<i>All’s Well That Ends Well</i>	1604–5
<i>Timon of Athens</i> (with Thomas Middleton)	1605
<i>King Lear</i>	1605–6
<i>Macbeth</i> (revised by Middleton)	1606
<i>Antony and Cleopatra</i>	1606
<i>Pericles</i> (with George Wilkins)	1607
<i>Coriolanus</i>	1608
<i>The Winter’s Tale</i>	1609
<i>Cymbeline</i>	1610
<i>The Tempest</i>	1611
<i>Henry VIII</i> (by Shakespeare and John Fletcher; known in its own time as <i>All is True</i>)	1611–12
<i>Cardenio</i> (by Shakespeare and Fletcher; lost)	1613
<i>The Two Noble Kinsmen</i> (by Shakespeare and Fletcher)	1613–14

Introduction

King John is one of the few medieval kings to survive in the popular imagination today, yet unlike Richard III or Henry V he is not principally famous as a Shakespearian character. From folklore, children's literature and the history of democracy, we know King John as the villainous opponent of Robin Hood and the Magna Carta, and thus the personal freedoms that they represent. But Robin Hood and the Magna Carta had less significance and different associations for the audiences of Shakespeare's time, and in the 1590s the reign of King John was seen in a much more positive light. For Elizabethans the king could occupy a heroic place in history, because he stood up to France and the pope, continual enemies to England. In keeping with this heroic tradition, King John had already become a well-known subject for the stage by the 1590s. Two early dramatic representations of his reign, John Bale's *King Johan* (c.1530s) and the anonymous 1591 play *The Troublesome Reign of King John*, positioned the king as an opponent to an oppressive Catholic Church. Shakespeare's *King John* hints at this anti-Catholic tradition, yet his play represents a much more ambiguous king, incorporating elements of the tyranny for which he is famous today.

King John was first staged around 1596, after the 1591 publication of its immediate source, *The Troublesome Reign*, and before 1598, when the play was held up as an exemplar of tragedy in Francis Meres's *Palladis Tamia*, an assessment of the literary culture of the day. This broad period is significant as marking the time, following the unsuccessful Spanish Armada of 1588, when the threat of a subsequent Spanish-Catholic invasion was a source of English anxiety. The patriotic and anti-Catholic elements of the play have traditionally been situated alongside this Spanish threat, and *King John* stands out as one of Shakespeare's most intense engagements with contemporary religious and continental politics. This is not to suggest, however, that Shakespeare's play is polemical, as *King John* seems to encourage a range of critical and theatrical interpretations. A tension between King John's potential status as villain or hero permeates Shakespeare's

treatment of his reign, giving scope to a variety of approaches.

Although *King John* was probably written around 1596, alongside *Richard II* and in the middle of most of his historical writing, it stands apart from Shakespeare's other historical dramas. Unusually, it is not one of a tetralogy, a sequence of four chronologically consecutive plays. Shakespeare favoured such groupings for eight of his history plays, *Richard II* through *Henry V* and *Henry VI, Part I* through *Richard III*. Yet he wrote no representations of reigns immediately before or immediately after King John's. The playwright, in fact, never again ventured so far back in time for a play of English history. The nearest he comes to such an early setting is the reign of Richard II, which ends nearly 200 years after King John's. The isolation of *King John* means that Shakespeare has to set the stage of history much more concisely than he does in his other history plays.

Shakespeare selected some of the most significant moments from King John's reign for his play. He also managed to give a sense of the reign in its entirety, by opening the action shortly after King John has been crowned and ending it just after his death. The play begins with the French ambassador challenging King John's right to rule on behalf of Arthur, Duke of Brittany. Arthur is John's nephew, his elder brother's son, and as such he could be seen as the legitimate heir to the throne. Facing this threat, King John swiftly sails to France with his army and engages in battle against Arthur and his French allies. Following a military stalemate, peace is reached through the marriage of King John's niece Blanche to the Dauphin of France. But the peace is short-lived, being broken through the influence of the pope, who is angry with King John for not appointing his chosen candidate as Archbishop of Canterbury. In the subsequent Anglo-French battles, Arthur is captured by the English and ultimately dies in their hands, thus ending his challenge to the throne. King John then returns to England, but faces a new threat from his own rebellious lords, angry at his treatment of Arthur. These lords are assisted by a French invasion of England, and after heavy losses to both the French and English armies, the two sides agree to a peace treaty, which has been negotiated by a representative of the pope. King John is assisted throughout the play by Philip, the bastard son of Richard I, who offers a commonsensical alternative to the political machinations of both the French and English. At the play's close, King John dies poisoned by a monk, and his son becomes King Henry III. The Bastard, who has come into increasing political prominence, offers the play's final lines,

a famously rousing injunction for England to be true to itself. As this narrative implies, Shakespeare stages a chain of political contentions that seem sequentially interrelated. But these events covered a historical period of seventeen years, from 1199 to 1216, and history here is heavily hewn in its transformation to drama. As with Shakespeare's other historical plays, the narrative is compressed into a tighter time-frame than the several years of history being represented, giving a sense of fast-paced dramatic action. But Shakespeare's compression in *King John* goes further: he leaves out essential details which would otherwise make it much less difficult to follow, seemingly relying on audience knowledge of the recent *Troublesome Reign* to fill in the gaps. This confusion has led some critics to accuse the play of lacking unity or overall cohesiveness, particularly in its representation of national politics.

Despite its historical distance and isolation, *King John* is one of Shakespeare's most political plays. Critics have long noted how the play touches upon three important issues of the 1590s: 1) the threat of Spanish invasion; 2) the question of the King of France's conversion from Protestantism to Catholicism in 1593, and thus France's status as an ally; and 3) the Elizabethan succession crisis. This final issue emerges because Queen Elizabeth was approaching the end of her life and had no children to succeed her. There were fears that several candidates might put themselves forward to rule England. Reflecting this anxiety, *King John* commences immediately after the death of Richard I, who had no legitimate children, and the play diverges from its sources in only hinting at the fact that Richard's will named John as his heir. In Shakespeare's version of the story, King John holds the crown, but the play frames his right to rule as a successor to Richard I as the central issue, and his leadership is continually put to question. The French ambassador, Chatillon, refers to King John's rule as 'borrowed majesty' in the fourth line of the play, and only John's death in the final scene settles the disputed title.

Yet the play's heavy political focus is most readily revealed in what it does not stage. *King John* dispenses with two of Shakespeare's most frequently used dramatic devices, erotic tension and combative violence, and focuses instead on set political negotiations. The only love match in the play is between Lewis, the Dauphin of France, and Blanche, niece of King John, and their hasty marriage is composed for political ends. The repudiation of any romantic attachment is made apparent by their wooing, which is brief and coldly stated. Lewis

focuses on his own appearance when looking at Blanche:

... in her eye I find
A wonder, or a wondrous miracle,
The shadow of myself formed in her eye; (II.1.496–8)

and Blanche admits that she finds nothing necessarily attractive in Lewis unless her uncle orders her to:

My uncle's will in this respect is mine.
If he see aught in you that makes him like,
That anything he sees which moves his liking,
I can with ease translate it to my will.
Or if you will, to speak more properly,
I will enforce it easily to my love. (510–15)

These are their most tender words to each other, and the relationship becomes more tense as the peace concord is broken, when Blanche must choose between her uncle's and her husband's sides. The brevity and superficiality of their relationship strongly contrasts to the extended wooing and love scenes that Shakespeare stages in his more famous history plays *Richard III* and *Henry V*. Even *The Troublesome Reign* develops the love interest further by representing an obvious attraction between Blanche and the Bastard, which complicates her union with Lewis. The fact that Shakespeare's Blanche and Lewis are the only married couple on stage (none of the principal characters has a wife or husband) creates a sterile environment where the passage of power is less dynastic, and more subject to contention.

Given this contention, it is also unusual that combative violence is missing from the play. Several violent threats are voiced, but swords are rarely drawn. The only named character to unsheathe his weapon is Salisbury. He is met with the Bastard's cold response: 'Your sword is bright, sir; put it up again' (IV.3.79), which he promptly does. Other fighting is depicted only by the 'excursions' of Act III, scene 2 and scene 3. In such a chivalric world, where war is continually being fought, this lack of combat is notable. *King John* stands out against Shakespeare's other early history plays, where one-on-one fights are important for characterization, plot and dramatic interest. (The exceptions to this rule are *Richard III* and *Richard II*, which have many challenges but few fights.) Since *The Troublesome Reign* has significant onstage fighting, Shakespeare seems actively to have stripped combat from his *King John*. Other forms of violence, however, have an important role in shaping the action. The political murder of prisoners

provides significant tragic effect in Shakespeare's historical drama, especially *Richard III* and *Richard II*. *King John* stages perhaps his most moving example of this scenic design, when King John attempts to murder a child who threatens his rule. The nature of patrilineal descent, whereby the crown passes to the eldest son's eldest son, means that young children can potentially be more powerful than their elders. With this threat in mind, John orders that his nephew Arthur be killed, and the grotesque tableau of the young boy facing horrific torture is one of Shakespeare's most disturbing scenes. Arthur, to everyone's relief, is left unharmed, but in trying to escape from further mischief he jumps from his prison walls to his death. This death is the closest we come to onstage violence in the play.

The general absence of romantic and violent moments creates a unique dramatic structure in *King John*, which is punctuated by repetitive moments of political negotiations, rather than scenes of wooing or fighting. Such negotiations, by their formal, ritualized nature, encourage a sense of balance between two sides of a dispute. The English and French continually argue for the justness of their causes, but mere argument never settles the issue, and because of these recurrent, unresolved conflicts, politics remains acutely balanced throughout the play.

Nowhere is this balance more obvious than in the parallel rhetoric of the play's political opponents. When King John and King Philip first meet their speeches are formulaically matched:

KING JOHN

Peace be to France – if France in peace permit
Our just and lineal entrance to our own.
If not, bleed France, and peace ascend to heaven,
Whiles we, God's wrathful agent, do correct
Their proud contempt that beats His peace to heaven.

KING PHILIP

Peace be to England – if that war return
From France to England, there to live in peace.
England we love, and for that England's sake
With burden of our armour here we sweat. (II.1.84–92)

On the cusp of battle, the kings share rhetorical strategies: they emphasize the need for peace, repeat their opponents' names and focus on bodily fluids. The ritualistic and polite tenor of their speeches contributes to a sense of political and dramatic balance, where causes

and characters are somewhat interchangeable.

In place of romantic intrigue and physical conflict, the dramatic interest in *King John* is provided by precisely such moments of rhetorical political exchange. (It is significantly one of the few Shakespeare plays written entirely in verse.) These measured verbal battles might not be as engaging as violence or as moving as romance, but they are certainly emotionally and politically charged. Political rhetoric is the only way to move armies in the play, and the words of both sides threaten the fate of nations. Every decision is up for debate in *King John*, and few characters pass up the opportunity to argue the rights or wrongs of a case.

The formal parleys are also given greater dramatic interest and complexity through the use of a fairly heavily loaded stage. The first major confrontation opens with: '*Enter on one side King Philip of France, Lewis the Dauphin, Constance, Arthur, lords, and soldiers; on the other side the Archduke of Austria and soldiers*' (II.1.0). Then enter the messenger of France, and the English party: '*King John, Queen Eleanor, Blanche, the Bastard, lords, and soldiers*' (83). Having all these bodies onstage would merely serve to heighten the sense of occasion (which was the goal of William Charles Macready when he involved scores of extras in his 1842 production), except that most of them interrupt the proceedings and are willing to put forth their own, frequently contradictory views. Such interjections deformalize the occasion and seem to give several more minor characters equal prominence with the kings.

Like the two kings, these politically subordinate characters are paired against one another on either side of the dispute and function as dramatic counter-weights. The rhetoric of these characters introduces a sharpness and immediacy to the confrontations, as they use personal insult instead of the more measured arguments of the politicians:

KING JOHN

Alack, thou dost usurp authority.

KING PHILIP

Excuse it is to beat usurping down.

QUEEN ELEANOR

Who is it thou dost call usurper, France?

CONSTANCE

Let me make answer: thy usurping son.

...

AUSTRIA

Peace!

BASTARD Hear the crier!

AUSTRIA

What the devil art thou?

(II.1.118–34)

Such insults, stripped of reasoning, make the case for John's right to rule even more difficult to distinguish, as one side hardly makes a claim without being matched by a counter-claim.

This stalemate leads the kings to ask the citizens of Angiers – English subjects – for rightful entry through the town gates. Each king would like to speak first, thereby gaining a seeming advantage, but the play blurs even this issue in the staccato back-and-forth exchange. Hubert, representative of the citizens of Angiers, asks: 'Who is it that hath warned us to the walls?', to be answered by the kings' rhetorical jostling:

KING PHILIP

'Tis France, for England.

KING JOHN

England, for itself.

You men of Angiers, and my loving subjects –

KING PHILIP

You loving men of Angiers, Arthur's subjects,

Our trumpet called you to this gentle parle –

KING JOHN

For our advantage; therefore hear us first. (II.1.201–6)

In this comic one-upmanship, both kings adopt similar strategies. Their subsequent appeals are of comparable lengths, with similar emphases on the threat of cannon. After the kings put forward their claims, Hubert, who represents the citizens, is unable to decide, acknowledging ambiguously: 'In brief, we are the King of England's subjects; | For him, and in his right, we hold this town' (267–8). Since neither John nor Arthur is adequately able to establish his position as king, the town gates remain closed.

Next the stage is cleared of all but Hubert, and after some military '*excursions*' (II.1.299) the French and English Heralds enter to proclaim victory. Once again the see-saw of rhetoric is apparent. The heralds of both sides enter with trumpeters and offer perfectly matched appraisals of the fight. The French Herald suggests that they have killed many English and kept their colours; the English Herald proffers the same evidence of success. Clearly neither side has decisively defeated the other, as Hubert reasons:

Heralds, from off our towers we might behold,

From first to last, the onset and retire
Of both your armies; whose equality
By our best eyes cannot be censurèd.
Hath bought blood and blows have answered
 blows,
Strength matched with strength and power confronted
 power.
Both are alike, and both alike we like. (325–31)

Hubert implies that the staging of the military action, which the audience also witnesses, is ritualistic, with each army advancing and retreating in equal measure. This is one of the few battle scenes, and it is significant that no named characters fight. England and France here are represented collectively, and they become as nearly indistinguishable in warfare as they were in rhetoric. The audience is encouraged to conclude with Hubert that ‘Both are alike’.

The Bastard is one character who is not prepared to accept such indeterminacy, however, and he suggests that together England and France turn to batter down the walls of Angiers, the pivot upon which both armies are poised. Yet Hubert, as citizen of Angiers, has a more peaceful proposal: he suggests the marriage of Blanche and Lewis, uniting the opponents in a dynastic bond. (It is significant that the dramatic platform incorporates ritualistic pairing again here, with an heir of John and an heir of Philip.) In the wedding negotiations, further equilibrium is maintained. England must offer a dowry ‘equal with a queen’ (II.1.486), while France must break its pact with Arthur and no longer assert his claim to the throne. Thus John loses a significant parcel of English land and money, while Arthur loses his only hope for the crown. At the same time, John achieves a stable kingdom, and Philip a larger realm. Shakespeare carefully manages the peace so that neither side has definitively won or lost, though the cause may seem lost for Arthur, who gains only Angiers and the earldom of Richmond.

Any sense of settlement, however, is short-lived: the treaty is broken in the next scene. The papal legate, Cardinal Pandulph, enters to denounce King John because he has not appointed the pope’s candidate for Archbishop of Canterbury. The King of France must realign himself with Arthur or face excommunication, and both sides return to the points at which they started, reinstating the previous balance of contention. ‘O fair return of banished majesty!’ says Constance to France, after earlier berating him, to which Eleanor responds: ‘O foul revolt of French inconstancy!’ (III.1.321–2).

Eleanor's lines must have been striking to the first audiences of the play, as Henry IV of France had recently switched from the Protestant cause to the Catholic one in European politics. Yet the many Catholics living in England in the 1590s might just as easily have sympathized with the French king's 'fair return'. As opponents in politics, rhetoric and warfare, the English and French are counterpoised in a way that is exceptional in Shakespeare's historical writings, which tend to represent the French more negatively than the English. The unsettled oppositions of national identity thus contribute a sense that *King John* takes a balanced approach to the representation of European politics.

King John displays a similar symmetry in its treatment of gender. The play's leading female characters – Eleanor, who sides with her son John, and Constance, who sides with her son Arthur – are remarkably similar. Both are powerful mothers, aspiring towards political gain for their sons and themselves. Constance is called 'ambitious' early in the play (I.1.32), and although Eleanor's 'conscience' tells her that her rule with John is suspect, she is obviously unwilling to relinquish power (I.1.42). Significantly, these characters are matched, like John and Philip, in their rhetorical strategies. Both use misogyny in their arguments against each other:

QUEEN ELEANOR

Thou unadvisèd scold, I can produce
A will that bars the title of thy son.

CONSTANCE

Ay, who doubts that! A will, a wicked will!
A woman's will, a cankered grandam's will! (II.1.191–4)

Their language here, grounded in the patrilineal authority of wills, also focuses on transgressive femininity, and early critics often found these speeches indecorous. The most disturbing exchange, and one that has frequently been cut in the theatre, comes when the women accuse each other of sexual infidelity:

QUEEN ELEANOR

Out, insolent! Thy bastard shall be king
That thou mayst be a queen and check the world.

CONSTANCE

My bed was ever to thy son as true
As thine was to thy husband; and this boy
Liker in feature to his father Geoffrey
Than thou and John in manners ... (II.1.122–7)

Eleanor may be punning on 'queen' as 'quean', which means 'whore',

and Constance strangely undermines Arthur's claim to the throne by suggesting that his father, Geoffrey, may have been a bastard. Throughout their arguments they pick up verbal cues from one another:

QUEEN ELEANOR

Thou monstrous slanderer of heaven and earth!

CONSTANCE

Thou monstrous injurer of heaven and earth! (173–4)

As this invective suggests, both are prepared to defend the men in their lives passionately, and their rants are usually provoked by slanders against their sons. Eleanor's first words, for instance, are intended to check Chatillon for insulting King John. 'A strange beginning – "borrowed majesty"!' (I.1.5) is her objection to Chatillon's characterization of John's rule. Later she is again determined to defend John's title when she protests to King Philip: 'Who is it thou dost call usurper, France?' (II.1.120). Constance similarly is most emotive when defending Arthur, though he, as a small boy, is less subject to direct verbal attack than the adult characters. King John and Arthur have been accused by critics and reviewers of being dominated by their mothers, but whether they are read as dominated or simply supported, they occupy comparable positions as sons. In this way, Eleanor and Constance stand on either side of King John, and their similarity further clouds the issue of his legitimacy.

Shakespeare's even-handed treatment of his female characters does not, however, lessen their significance within the play, where, in the first part at least, they play a more substantial role than the women in his other histories, except perhaps *Richard III*. Powerful female voices rarely appear in the canonical history plays, where women are traditionally stifled or demonized. In keeping with the complex representation of national identity in *King John*, female characters are not merely associated with French degeneracy, as they clearly are in Shakespeare's other early histories, especially the *Henry VI* plays. *King John*'s women, who in their historical origins were varying combinations of French and English, are as ambiguously represented as the men, and they are allowed to flourish, even as politicians.

In the second half of the play, however, Shakespeare's focus shifts, and Eleanor and Constance both disappear after Act III. Their passage is barely registered by the characters on stage and appears to be politically insignificant:

MESSENGER

... The first of April died
Your noble mother [Eleanor]; and, as I hear, my lord,
The Lady Constance in a frenzy died
Three days before. But this from rumour's tongue
I idly heard; if true or false I know not.

KING JOHN

Withhold thy speed, dreadful occasion!
O, make a league with me till I have pleased
My discontented peers. What! Mother dead?
How wildly then walks my estate in France!
(IV.2.120–28)

John seems to have little remorse for the deaths of either his opponent or his mother, as he is absorbed instead by the political crisis he faces with the French invasion. For all their political and theatrical power in the early parts of the play, Eleanor and Constance are finally alike in being unmissed in death, their epitaphs reduced to a few lines from an anonymous messenger.

As we have seen, Shakespeare builds into *King John* a highly repetitive dramatic structure based upon unresolved contention between England and France, and manifested in an even pairing of kings, courtiers and women. Several resolutions to the central question of John's reign are proposed, but all are ineffective, and seldom does one side appear to be ahead of the other for long. This circularity leads to an unsettling indeterminacy. Both sides are so evenly matched, in their powers of language, combat, argument and character, that it is difficult for the audience, like the citizens of Angiers, to choose between them.

With the warring parties so evenly matched, the focus of characters and audience alike turns to the representation of King John. But here, too, Shakespeare presents us with a very mixed picture, as the play closely follows the historical reign of the king, with its mixture of good and bad acts, heroism and villainy. In the eighteenth century the editor William Warburton noted that King John should have made an ideal dramatic hero: 'John had that Turbulence and Grandeur of the Passions, that Inconstancy of Temper, that equal Mixture of Good and Ill, and that Series of Misfortunes consequent thereto, as might make him very fit for a Hero in a just Composition' (quoted in Candido, *Shakespeare: The Critical Tradition*, p. 2). Not many critics, however, have seen Shakespeare's *King John* as 'a just Composition', and Warburton, like others, ultimately expresses dissatisfaction with the character of the king. Shakespeare often represents morally

questionable heroes, but something about King John has made critics and audiences uneasy with his status as a protagonist.

John starts his kingship decisively. He rejects the threat of the French king, as relayed by the ambassador Chatillon, and arbitrates an English dispute when the Faulconbridge brothers argue over rights to their dead father's fortune. John fairly ensures that both brothers depart happily, with the rightful heir Robert holding the land, and his elder brother Philip knighted and acknowledged as the bastard son of Richard I. John then speeds to attack France, arriving so quickly that the ambassador returns only moments before him. Because the king is effective, just and powerful in the beginning of the play, his metamorphosis over its course is striking, as he becomes deceitful, murderous and manipulative during the middle parts, and is weak and ineffective by its close.

The most telling and shocking change comes with King John's attempt to murder Arthur (but cf. commentary to iv.1). At first the king only hints that this is his goal, by saying to Hubert:

He is a very serpent in my way,
And wheresoe'er this foot of mine doth tread
He lies before me. Dost thou understand me?
Thou art his keeper. (III.3.61–4)

When Hubert insists that he will 'keep him so | That he shall not offend your majesty' (64–5), King John replies that this can be achieved only through Arthur's 'Death' (66). This simple word instigates the king's greatest act of villainy. That Arthur is on the stage at this time and that the means of death, as we later learn, includes the onstage burning out of Arthur's eyes, add to the magnitude of the crime. Even though this execution is prevented by Hubert, the attempted assassination taints John's moral standing for the remainder of the play. Shakespeare has John repent in Act IV, but the words, motivated by the threat of the rebelling English lords, ring hollow:

They burn in indignation. I repent.
There is no sure foundation set on blood,
No certain life achieved by others' death. (IV.2.103–5)

These are appropriate political maxims for the threatened prince, but they do not sound sincere. The order to murder Arthur brings John's villainy to its height, and his subsequent repentance and joy at Arthur's survival cannot fully counterpoise this. Arthur later dies in trying to escape from John, so the king becomes only indirectly

responsible for the boy's death. None the less, John's culpability is repeatedly emphasized by himself and the other lords, and this is a fault that may be seen to contribute to his fall.

When that fall comes, however, it is unlike the death of any other Shakespearian historic or tragic hero. John dies slowly and in agony across four scenes. During these scenes, political and military decisions are made by others, while John writhes helplessly onstage. He is 'almost speechless' (V.6.24), his few lines focusing on his 'bosom', 'bowels', 'maw', 'lips' and 'heart' (V.7.30 ff.), in a grotesque reminder of failing bodily functions. Further indignity is suffered as John dies in the background while the Bastard discusses his preparations against the French. John does not enjoy the noble death of a typical tragic hero, nor does his death mark an execution of justice, as we see in a tragic villain like Macbeth. His death seems to matter so little to the action of the play that it does not even provide a strong sense of closure. Although *King John* revolves around the king's life, it almost strips his death of significance.

The most unusual break from a traditional structure of tragedy or teleological history, however, comes in the dissociation of John's punishment from his crimes. We hear in Act V from Hubert that 'The King, I fear, is poisoned by a monk' (V.6.23), but the audience is never informed why a monk would want to poison him. The monk is simply, according to Hubert, 'a resolvèd villain' (29). The religious orders have some cause for revenge, because John had raided their coffers to pay for his war with France, but Shakespeare does not make this motivation very clear. In the first act, John notes that: 'Our abbeyes and our priories shall pay | This expeditious charge' (I.1.48–9). Later, John orders the Bastard to 'shake the bags | Of hoarding abbots' (III.3.7–8), and we see the Bastard return successfully enriched at IV.2.141 ff. Those very brief notices of transgression seem insufficient justifications for a monk's murderous reprisal. In this, Shakespeare has departed from his sources. We know that the playwright made frequent use of Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles* as a source of historical material, and it seems likely that he may have consulted it while preparing *King John*. In Holinshed's account, John plans to raise the price of grain in punishment for the revolt of the English people, 'Whereupon a monk that heard him speak such words, being moved with zeal for the oppression of his country, gave the king poison in a cup of ale' (Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, vol. IV, p. 47). The author of Shakespeare's more immediate source, *The Troublesome Reign*, fabricates several scenes involving monks. He

represents the Bastard collecting tax monies from lecherous priors, and the monks plotting to poison King John. He also elaborately stages the poisoning itself, with the monk, the abbot and King John dying in one scene. *The Troublesome Reign* has a clear moral about the nefarious monks of England, representing their lasciviousness, greed and ambition. *King John* may show the king at fault for taxing monks heavily, depending on the audience's religious disposition, but without representing either this taxation or the monks' moral depravity, it offers no clear links between John's actions in life and his subsequent death.

For most of Shakespeare's play, King John's success and fall is progressive and linear, the standard trajectory of a flawed king, and the play, though ostensibly a history, can certainly be approached as a tragedy in this way. John's flaw may be seen, for instance, as his willingness to protect his crown at all costs, including arranging the shameful treaty with France and the murder of his rival, Arthur. But this classic movement from goodness to corruption does not in this play tend to evoke audience sympathy or a sense of tragic justice, simply because it is difficult to care greatly about the fate of the king. This is partly because John's eventual fate seems to be divorced from the flaws in his character. But equally, tragedy, in such an Aristotelian model, needs to evoke fear and pity, and *King John* does neither for its protagonist. These emotions are more strongly associated with Arthur.

If John's fate fails to move the audience, it is perhaps related to the fact that John himself appears to have so little control over the events that shape his life. John does not have the speeches or decision-making powers of a typical hero. His crises may be brought upon himself, but they do not occupy much of the playing time, and when they do occur, they are brushed aside because other matters are pressing. As we have seen, John practically ignores his mother's death because he must focus instead on the urgent threat of the French invasion (IV.2.120 ff.). A single messenger brings the news of both events within the space of a few lines, and John must quickly face the 'prophet' Peter of Pomfret, who predicts that John will give up his crown. So many ills are run together that they become difficult to differentiate and seem unconnected to the king's earlier actions. This distanced ending in turn makes it difficult to empathize with his personal fate.

These deflections from a central focus on the fate of the king suggest that it is not principally his play, even though the full title in its first printing is *The Life and Death of King John* (1623). But the title

is apt simply because a conception of his character shapes the way that all of the other characters are seen. The main dispute in the play is over King John's place as a legitimate king. Every character must rest either for or against him in that respect, though the pope, the French, and the English lords change their positions in the course of the action. Even the Bastard's principal characteristic is thus that he is John's strongest, and most effective, supporter. Because King John is the ill-defined and contested centre around which the other characters must gravitate, ambiguity in shaping his character in performance imbues the other characters with a complexity and an interest that serve to elevate the entire play above the satirical pantomime it could become, if John were represented as simply an evil murderer or a heroic protector of English freedoms.

If the title character is represented ambiguously as hero and villain in *King John*, the allies and enemies of the English king are similarly marked by this ambiguity. We first see Hubert, for instance, as the leading citizen of Angiers, unable to decide in favour of the English or French king. He thus has an uncertain relation to John from his introduction. In suggesting the 'peace and fair-faced league' between England and France (II.1.417), however, he discloses a more sophisticated political awareness than the other characters and emerges as an ally of King John. This alliance is tested when King John later orders him to murder Arthur (III.3.66). Hubert's unquestioning acquiescence to so obviously villainous a role is unexpected, yet in an even more unexpected turnabout Hubert becomes emotionally attached to his victim. Arthur tells of how he has looked after Hubert when he was unwell (IV.1.41 ff.), and the child's claims of friendship and natural justice quickly persuade Hubert to abandon John's warrant. Hubert's morality gets the better of political expediency, which would have seen him keep his promise to the king.

Hubert's strong moral stance is taken further in his subsequent harrowing of King John, in one of the most famous scenes in the play. He starts by informing the king about the 'five moons' seen in the sky, which caused 'Old men and beldams in the streets | [To] prophesy upon it dangerously', while 'Young Arthur's death is common in their mouths' (IV.2.185-7). Hubert implies a connection between the death of Arthur and the possible rebellion, even though he alone knows that Arthur is alive. Significantly, Hubert's baiting of the king offers an opportunity to see how John would react to the 'murder' of Arthur. The king attempts to shift the blame for Arthur's death to Hubert,

before finally and briefly mentioning his 'conscience' (248). At this point, as if waiting for John's guilty cue, Hubert calms the king by saying:

Arm you against your other enemies;
I'll make a peace between your soul and you.
Young Arthur is alive. (249–51)

Hubert's defiance of King John is therefore paradoxical. He ends up doing exactly what John wishes for and needs: in ignoring John's orders, Hubert seems to have prevented the king's deposition. The dislocation of ideas of truth and loyalty here works to confound simple structures of right, wrong and culpability, complicating, instead of clarifying, King John's status as either hero or villain. The dramatic irony, only moments later, of Arthur dying while trying to escape from his prison makes these complications even more unsettling. Once John discovers that Arthur lives, he and Hubert make no efforts to try to comfort or release him, as they are concerned only with the 'angry lords' of England (268). Arthur thus dies in desperation on his own, with Hubert and John at fault for their negligence, yet distanced from full responsibility.

Like Hubert, Arthur gives rise to a complex audience response to King John's right to rule. Arthur is the subject of the most moving scenes in the play, and he usually elicits audience sympathy. From a moral standpoint, Arthur's tragic end challenges the audience's belief in the idea of John's heroism. But from a political perspective, it is possible to read the antagonism of John and Arthur differently. Shakespeare reshapes history to make Arthur a small boy without political skill or ambition. Although Shakespeare never discloses Arthur's age, he makes the character seem very young, apparently no more than ten years old. Historically, Arthur was on the verge of manhood when he died, and he is represented as a much older character in *The Troublesome Reign*. Shakespeare also departs from his sources in representing Arthur as having no interest in politics. He rarely comments on political circumstances, and claims to have no desire for kingship: 'I would that I were low laid in my grave. | I am not worth this coil that's made for me' (II.1.164–5). His only claim to authority is the 'heaven-moving pearls' of his tears (169). There could hardly be a greater contrast to the forthright activity that John undertakes to secure power. Arthur's weakness in part helps to evoke sympathy, but it also throws into doubt his suitability as King of England.

Furthermore, the historical Arthur's legal case for the throne is given less significance in Shakespeare's *King John*, as the play works to complicate the notion of birth as a criterion for rule. There is much talk of legitimacy, but being illegitimate obviously does not diminish virtue or political adroitness here, as the Bastard demonstrates. By dislocating the connection between birth and leadership, and by representing Arthur as politically inept, the play makes his case for kingship particularly weak. It seems important that we care for Arthur's fate, but that does not necessarily endorse his claim to the throne. While King John undoubtedly becomes sullied by his plot to assassinate Arthur, this plotting does not make him a less suitable alternative to French or papal occupation. Arthur becomes insignificant in contrast with these larger external threats, which are imposing because, unlike Arthur's candidacy, they are never fully contained.

From the beginning of the play, King John encounters a merry-go-round of opponents, some of whom eventually become his allies. His attackers include King Philip, Lewis the Dauphin, Constance, Austria, Cardinal Pandulph and the English lords. Because of the number of these opponents, some of whom say little, it is difficult to gain a developed sense of their causes. This is especially true after Act IV, when the focus of opposition to John falls on Lewis and the revolting English lords.

Lewis's attack appears to be motivated by personal gain. When Cardinal Pandulph tells him of King John's peace with Rome, removing any cause for the French invasion, Lewis refuses to retreat:

I will not back.

I am too high-born to be propertied,
To be a secondary at control,
Or useful servingman and instrument
To any sovereign state throughout the world.
(V.2.78–82)

Lewis's defiance of the pope places him in a similar position to John earlier in the play, but it seems hypocritical, as papal sanction was the initial justification for the war. Seemingly aware of this hypocrisy, Lewis comes up with a new claim a few lines later: 'I, by the honour of my marriage-bed, | After young Arthur, claim this land for mine' (93–4). But here Lewis's appeal to hereditary right is one of the least just to be espoused in the play, and the distance of his claim makes a mockery of lineage as a foundation of rule.

None the less, Lewis finds powerful backers in the English lords, Salisbury, Pembroke and Bigot. The motivations behind the lords' rebellion are left indeterminate by Shakespeare, who, unlike the author of *The Troublesome Reign*, does not stage their meeting at Bury St Edmunds (cf. IV.3.11). The death of Arthur seems to be their principal objection to King John, but, crucially, the lords decide to rebel before they find Arthur's body. It is difficult to empathize with the lords' rebellion, as we have hardly encountered them and do not know what they stand for. Furthermore, Shakespeare makes the rebellion a cause of the elite alone. Unlike historical reports, which note that the common people sided with the French invaders, no mention is made in *King John* of the people taking up arms. The relationship of the English lords to John is made even more doubtful by their return to him at the end of the play. Melun tells them that Lewis intends to have them killed (V.4), and we next see them as John's retainers (V.7), effectively containing their opposition to him.

A consideration of individual characters in *King John* shows that the play cultivates an even-handed approach to its central problem: should King John hold the English throne? Although this is a play of political personalities, those personalities, taken as a whole, contribute to the sense of ambiguity, making it difficult for audiences to take sides. Despite their overall ambiguity, however, characters usually have clearly defined ideas of right and wrong. A focus on character, therefore, yields a sense of balance, but a focus on wider thematic issues potentially yields a different interpretation. Such collective beliefs in *King John* serve to link seemingly disparate groups of characters, so that even the English and French have ideological similarities. As we shall see, this is particularly so in their responses to chivalry, Catholicism and fate.

In keeping with its medieval setting, *King John* is especially concerned with issues of chivalry and honour. The antagonism of the Bastard and Austria, who had killed the Bastard's father, Richard I, is the principal example of chivalry in the play. Their contention interrupts the more measured political rhetoric of the chief adversaries, with a series of taunts and challenges. When King John and King Philip first agree to fight, the Bastard seems obsessed with a chivalric response to his father's death:

Saint George, that swinged the dragon, and e'er since
Sits on's horseback at mine hostess' door,
Teach us some fence! (*To Austria*) Sirrah, were I at home

At your den, sirrah, with your lioness,
I would set an ox-head to your lion's hide,
And make a monster of you. (II.1.288–93)

This is a strikingly irreverent speech in the formal context of a battlefield parley. The Bastard invokes the greatest English knight, St George, as a combined recollection of nationalism and heroic violence. At the same time he aspires to cuckold Austria (giving him ox horns), in a strange parody of typically chivalric forbidden love. The Bastard's brusqueness mocks traditional chivalry while basing his authority upon it. Significantly, it is an authority without a past: the Bastard has no military training, as he acknowledges in asking the saint, 'Teach us some fence'.

The Bastard develops military skill in the course of the play. He manages to take Austria's mark of honour, his 'lion's hide' of Richard I, by striking off his head (III.2). He repels the combined violence of Salisbury, Bigot and Pembroke when they try to kill Hubert (IV.3.79 ff.). And famously, he leads the English forces at the end of the play. The Bastard becomes the most chivalric character, but paradoxically he both relies on and resists chivalric values. The growth of his military might is progressive; he successively exceeds the prowess of Austria, the English lords and King John. Yet the Bastard actively undercuts his chivalric stance through his self-serving motivations. In his famous speech on commodity – self-interest – at the end of Act II, he rails against the French and English kings for choosing to gain or preserve land instead of fighting for right or honour. But he concludes:

Since kings break faith upon commodity,
Gain, be my lord – for I will worship thee! (II.1.597–8)

His most measured military strategy, that the French, Austrian and English armies unite to batter the walls of recalcitrant Angiers (II.1.373 ff.), shows political acumen, but it is also non-chivalric to bully and slaughter the innocent citizens in this way. The Bastard gains personally from his military exploits, rising to command the English army at the time of John's death, but because the Bastard positions himself ironically towards chivalry throughout *King John*, he pointedly highlights his knightly stance as role-playing. It is also significant that, in keeping with the overall lack of violence in the play, *King John* stages none of his chivalric acts. Unlike other plays with medieval settings, such as *Henry V*, *Macbeth* or *Richard III*, *King John* offers no visual reinforcement of chivalric ideals, making much

of the challenging talk of the Bastard seem like empty bluster. The most significant staging of chivalry is the Bastard's entry '*with Austria's head*' (III.2.0), after rescuing Queen Eleanor, but even here the fighting remains unstaged. (*The Troublesome Reign*, in contrast, has the Bastard formally challenge Austria to single combat and stages the Bastard's killing of him.)

King John validates chivalry as a path to honour, because the Bastard is able to achieve some heroic identity from such unheroic origins, yet the self-serving nature of the Bastard's military pursuits, and their absence from the stage, contribute to a sense that *King John* partially endorses and partially undermines chivalry as a value. Although chivalry is largely an English quality in the play (with Austria and Lewis partaking of it a little), its primary association with the character of the Bastard means that it does not significantly add to or detract from the English cause.

The same may be said for another central ideology of the play, Catholicism. King John was known in the Elizabethan period as a proto-Protestant king, and Shakespeare's principal source, *The Troublesome Reign of King John*, is a piece of anti-Catholic propaganda. It stages lascivious and murderous monks as opponents to King John, who openly defies them and the pope. The final lines of the play provide a neat anti-papal moral:

If England's peers and people join in one,
Nor pope, nor France, nor Spain can do them wrong.
(Part II, 1195–6)

Shakespeare's handling of Catholicism is more measured. Both John and Lewis the Dauphin challenge papal authority in the course of the play, and Shakespeare stages no evil monks. Shakespeare's Cardinal Pandulph is politically Machiavellian, but no more so than the other principal characters. It is possible to find anti-Catholicism in Shakespeare's play, for instance in John's rejection of the pope as a 'meddling priest' (III.1.163), and it has been staged as religious propaganda, but it is telling that when Colley Cibber wanted to produce a Protestant play in 1745, he completely rewrote Shakespeare's version and called it *Papal Tyranny in the Reign of King John*.

A final ideology shaping the action of *King John* is birthright. Arthur's authority rests on his being the surviving child of King John's elder brother Geoffrey. This issue opens the play, and becomes the central focus for questions of legitimacy (I.1.7 ff.). King John claims

that his 'strong possession and [his] right' makes him the true king (I.1.39), and it is later hinted that John rules because Richard I made him his heir. As Queen Eleanor says, 'I can produce | A will that bars the title of [Arthur]' (II.1.191–2). *King John*, however, places little overall importance on these immediate sources of 'right'. The question over who has the appropriate blood to rule England becomes obscured.

This theme surfaces elsewhere in the play, in the figure of the Bastard. The Bastard is introduced as Philip Faulconbridge, the legitimate heir of Sir Robert Faulconbridge. The first scene establishes clearly that Philip is a bastard, and the true son of Richard I. In the strictest terms of lineal descent, Philip is thus positioned as the closest heir to the throne, but this potential status is never explained. He refuses one birthright, that of Faulconbridge, for another, that of illegitimate Plantagenet, and is knighted onstage (I.1.162). As with the chivalric code and religious authority, such concepts of legitimacy and birthright do not ultimately resolve the conflict between John and Arthur.

The play also calls into question the role that fate plays in John's life. Although in just two scenes (IV.2 and 3) John suffers a sequence of bad luck, from the accidental death of Arthur to Peter of Pomfret's prognostication of the loss of his crown to the appearance of five moons, these symbolic events have little effect on his rule. The death of Arthur becomes a cause of the nobles, but they seem determined to rebel regardless of the boy. Peter of Pomfret and the five moons are representative of John's decline, but they have no causal relationship to his fall.

The same cannot be said of John's poisoning and the subsequent destruction of his army at Lincoln Washes. Because there is no strong connection between John's earlier actions and his poisoning by a monk, his death seems fated, just part of an unfortunate ordering of events. Even more fated is the loss of much of the English army to treacherous North Sea tides:

BASTARD

... half my power this night,
Passing these flats, are taken by the tide –
These Lincoln Washes have devourèd them ...
(V.6.39–41)

This English misfortune, however, is positioned soon after Lewis hears of a similar flooding of his military resources:

MESSENGER

The Count Melun is slain. The English lords
By his persuasion are again fallen off,
And your supply, which you have wished so long,
Are cast away and sunk on Goodwin Sands. (V.5.10–13)

Once more, Shakespeare brings the similar misfortunes of both armies into close proximity, leaving the resolution of the conflict open and finely balanced.

Whether considering the issue from the perspective of rhetoric, character, politics, gender, ideology or fate, *King John* is ambiguous in its representation of the central question of the play, the legitimacy of John's rule. In addition, the play seems to offer little sense of closure, as King John's death does not in itself greatly affect the direction of England, and there is an uneasy resolution to the war with France. The combination of this ambiguity and lack of closure has caused *King John* to be met with accusations of disunity. When Colley Cibber adapted the play in 1745, he claimed that 'I have endeavoured to make it more like a play than what I found it in Shakespeare' (quoted in *Candido*, p. 2). The play has also been criticized for its unusual dramatic pace and trajectory, seeming much more episodic than linear. In 1824, Augustine Skottowe wrote that '... the want of a leading interest is imperfectly supplied by a mere collection of incidents' (*Candido*, p. 64). Much of the critical charge about *King John*'s disunity is simply a reflection of the play's balance, and it seems like a collection of incidents precisely because many of the events actively contradict one another. In this context, the ending of the play, where the crown passes to a new ruler, is where we might expect to find resolution and closure.

King John ends with Prince Henry's accession to the throne, and he may be seen as providing continuance and resolution for the English cause. Unlike his father, Henry III has not been contaminated by crime or even political wrangling, as his existence is hidden for most of the play. Shakespeare's plays often end with the leadership of under-represented characters, like Fortinbras in *Hamlet* or Henry VII in *Richard III*. Such a dramatic strategy offers a mixture of hope and doubt, as typical responses to the unknown. *King John* seems to highlight this mixture, as the French threat, though diminished, still haunts the English court. Salisbury reports that:

The Cardinal Pandulph is within at rest,
Who half an hour since came from the Dauphin,

And brings from him such offers of our peace
As we with honour and respect may take,
With purpose presently to leave this war. (V.7.82–6)

The Bastard is wary, however, noting that ‘He will the rather do it when he sees | Ourselves well-sinewèd to our defence’ (87–8). It seems that peace will ultimately triumph, yet the Bastard offers a final warning, which many critics have taken to be the overriding moral of the play:

This England never did, nor never shall,
Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror
But when it first did help to wound itself.
Now these her princes are come home again,
Come the three corners of the world in arms
And we shall shock them! Naught shall make us rue
If England to itself do rest but true! (112–18)

The nation, like the play, has lacked unity throughout, and the Bastard’s call for it in the final lines offers an appealing sense of closure. However, this closure is not as straightforward as he hopes. The returned ‘princes’ include the recent rebels, Salisbury, Pembroke and Bigot, and the otherwise absent Prince Henry. Because these characters have either worked against or not participated in the fight for English survival, relying on them for national unity seems overly optimistic.

It is also important to remember that the Bastard is a character, with represented desires, proclivities and biases. Granting him a choral function has been a popular choice on the stage, as he provides monologues assessing the action in the first two acts (I.1.182–219; II.1.561–98), but by the end of the play the Bastard is too well integrated with the action to be simply a spokesperson for the play’s meaning. Throughout he offers a more aggressive stance than those around him, and in his advocacy of war at all costs he has actually been a figure of disunity. This aggression may derive from the Bastard’s dependency upon the honour he can win from the king. When he claims ‘I’ll take my chance’ (I.1.151) in his first appearance, he acknowledges that he will have to work for honours, and his field of work will clearly be fighting. His being knighted onstage is a formal indication of his movement towards a chivalric role. With this in mind, his continual opposition to peace (as in: ‘Then let confusion of one part confirm | The other’s peace. Till then, blows, blood, and death!’ (II.1.359–60)) corresponds to his potential for personal gain.

Similarly, the Bastard's most famous speech, on commodity, has been taken as a just appraisal of the kings' cynical peace bargain, but his monologue says nothing that the other characters have not admitted to. The French king acknowledges that he goes back on his word (II.1.548–9), and King John is obviously anxiously bartering a part for the whole. In many respects the Bastard's ideas on commodity are challenged by his own behaviour. As he asserts: 'And why rail I on this commodity? | But for because he hath not wooed me yet' (II.1.587–8). This is a speech that tells us as much about the Bastard's character as about the play's representation of its political climate.

The final speech of the play, with its rousing call for military preparedness and its advocacy of good old-fashioned Englishness, needs to be understood in the light of the Bastard's early speeches, which clearly reveal his instinct for self-preservation and self-advancement. The Bastard's call for unity is new to his character, but it can be read as a politic response to the new union of factions, while at the same time promoting a continued military awareness that would personally serve him as a soldier. In the course of the play the Bastard shifts rapidly from country clown (downright and commonsensical) to chivalric hero, and his rise in power forms a stark contrast to the decline in John's. This inversion has led some critics and productions to position the Bastard as the true hero. He undoubtedly has more charisma than the other characters, but his hawkish military presence represents just one voice in the overall balance of the play. *King John* does not take pains to validate the Bastard's views, even if it is certainly a possible, and a popular, interpretative choice.

King John in part demonstrates the necessity of unity through the chaos of its absence, yet this chaos is theatrically challenging and exciting. The audience is rarely encouraged to take sides with a single perspective, yet each perspective is given some credibility. This ambiguity has been dissatisfying for some, but for others it adds complexity to considerations of larger issues of politics, religion, gender and honour. *King John* represents conflicting stances on these and other ideologies, in part because the play focuses diversely on a wide range of perspectives, deploying Shakespeare's artful multi-vocality as well as any other. Although the play hinges on King John's role, his character does not dominate the action, allowing a variety of powerful voices to emerge and vie for our attention, from the loyal and charismatic Bastard to the moving and forthright Constance. The fruitful open-endedness of *King John*, and the potential it offers for

different interpretations, makes it one of the most engaging and challenging plays to stage and watch.

Eugene Giddens

The Play in Performance

King John is one of Shakespeare's more rarely read plays, yet it has been continually well received by theatre audiences, highlighting its place as a play that fares much better on the stage than the page. It appealed especially to ages in which lavish sets were popular, when it attracted as much attention for its costumes and scenery as for individual performances. In the nineteenth century, this theatrical success was a product of the play's many occasions for spectacle, including scenes at the gates of Angiers, Northampton Castle and Swinstead Abbey (II.1, IV.1 and V.7). But *King John* also holds many opportunities and challenges for modern performance.

Among these is the large distribution of lead parts, with moving scenes and speeches for male, female and child roles. The play is often accused of lacking unity, yet its episodic nature enables small parts to have powerful moments, and several brief tensions are given unusually prominent dramatic focus. Lady Faulconbridge, for instance, disappears after the first scene, yet in that scene she is placed in the difficult situation of explaining her sexual past to her son. Her son, the Bastard, has a much more substantial part, yet it is possible to focus on brief moments in his role. At times of war, especially, his militant final homage to England (V.7.110–18) has shaped productions, and more peaceful times have equally valued his cynical appraisal of commodity (II.1.561–98) – the way politicians look after themselves instead of their nations. Many directors have fashioned their productions around these choric speeches, yet the intervening, multi-vocal scenes of contention and persuasion can be just as successful onstage.

Constance is the character perhaps most strongly associated with contention and persuasion in *King John*, and reviewers have long relished performances of the role, which, though small, has great dramatic power. She demands more emotional range than any other character in the play, and the part has been especially prized for its rare opportunity to represent a Shakespearian young mother. Sarah Siddons, for instance, performed Constance in productions from 1783

to 1812 and relished the maternal aspects of the role: 'My idea of Constance ... is that of a lofty and proud spirit, associated with the most exquisite feelings of maternal tenderness, which is, in truth, the predominant feature of this interesting personage' (quoted in Candido, p. 83). Constance's scene of lamentation for her son (III.1) is justly famous and was seen as the focal point of the play in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when Siddons made it a signature moment.

Constance first appears in Act II, where her initial rants about infidelity (e.g. II.1.121 ff.) seem to lack political acumen and have often been cut in the theatre. Most of those present simply ignore her, and when she does attract attention, even from her own camp, it is largely negative. King Philip, for instance, attempts to quiet her with: 'Peace, lady! Pause, or be more temperate. | It ill beseems this presence to cry aim | To these ill-tuned repetitions' (II.1.195–7). But although her rhetoric and grief may be contained by the onstage characters, her lines have received audience sympathy. They also pave the way for her more moving scenes later in the play. When Constance enters at Act III, scene 1, grief has overwhelmed her powers of speech. She utters monosyllables of disbelief: 'Gone to be married? Gone to swear a peace? | False blood to false blood joined! Gone to be friends?' (III.1.1–2). She goes through a formulaic Shakespearian response to bad news: questioning – attacking the messenger – feeling physical pain – requesting confirmation – railing against Fortune – and final collapse. This scene has been remarkably successful onstage, particularly as enacted by Siddons, but recently some directors have found it excessive. Peter Thompson noted of John Barton's 1974 Royal Shakespeare Company production that Constance was staged as 'the embarrassing product of over-writing' (*Shakespearean Criticism*, vol. 24, p. 227). The problem seems to be that Constance's railing focuses exclusively on herself. She turns to her son only briefly in this sequence (III.1.34, 51–2), and seems to forget him altogether when referring to her woes, which, she claims, 'I alone | Am bound to underbear' (64–5). His indifference, 'I do beseech you, madam, be content' (42), might allow a staging that tips the balance away from empathy with her grief towards suspicion of her ambition. In keeping with this ambiguity, Constance famously sits on the stage, which suggests her despair, but might equally appear to be a sign of petulance or ambition. 'Here is my throne. Bid kings come bow to it' (III.1.74) highlights both her helplessness (her pleas must rest unanswered) and, less overtly, a desire to have kings under her

thumb.

When Arthur is captured by the English and we hear that King John wants him dead (III.2 and 3), however, the play shifts to a state of near-unchallenged sympathy for Constance. When she re-enters in scene 4, her railing is largely undiminished, yet it is framed by compassion from those around her. King Philip marks her entry by saying:

Look who comes here! A grave unto a soul,
Holding th'eternal spirit, against her will,
In the vile prison of afflicted breath.
I prithee, lady, go away with me. (III.4.17–20)

For the first time someone onstage respects her grief, and at this point, Constance's suffering seems more meaningful. It is distanced from political ambition and moves towards the more palpable emotions of a grieving mother:

O Lord! My boy, my Arthur, my fair son!
My life, my joy, my food, my all the world!
My widow-comfort, and my sorrows' cure! (III.4.103–5)

These are her final words, overriding any sense of selfish ambition that may have been brought to the stage earlier. We hear of her again only to be informed of her death.

Theatrical tradition suggests that those playing Constance may have attempted to develop excessive sympathy for the role, which vacillates between dramatic power and political powerlessness. Even Sarah Siddons noted that: '... whether the majestic, the passionate, the tender Constance, has ever yet been, or ever will be, personated to the entire satisfaction of sound judgement and fine taste, I believe to be doubtful; for I believe it to be nearly impossible' (quoted in *Candido*, p. 85). A later Constance, Helen Faucit, who played the part in 1842, also emphasized the difficulty of the role, saying that it is: 'the most arduous, we believe, of all the Shakespearian female characters – for this plain reason, that while it is one of those exhibiting the highest order of powers, the range of emotions included in it is the widest ...' (George Fletcher, theatre critic, in *Candido*, p. 119). A further difficulty is that the play takes pains to place Constance as one (possibly selfish) voice among many, and these early scenes can be shaped to repudiate or enhance her position. There is also the danger that, after these brief but powerful appearances, the audience will experience the rest of the play without Constance as a disappointment,

as audiences apparently did after Sarah Siddons's great success in the role. Thomas Campbell reported that: '[Mrs Siddons] was ere long regarded as so consummate in the part of Constance, that it was not unusual for spectators to leave the house when her part in the tragedy of *King John* was over, as if they could no longer enjoy Shakespeare himself when she ceased to be his interpreter' (quoted in Candido, p. 83). Constance's popularity has decreased over time, so that Claire Bloom's 1984 BBC performance of the role stands in contrast to earlier productions in being quite muted. Audiences have grown less sympathetic to the character's early emotional outbursts. None the less, Constance is a role of potentially great range. She can be in turn ambitious, nurturing, callous and piteous. Or an actress can readily highlight any one of these traits above the others. This potentiality has made the role justly popular, which is all the more striking for the fact that the character appears in only two acts.

Like the Constance scenes, the interactions between King John and Hubert are scenes of persuasion and tend to be favourites with the audience. Yet these are more intimate moments than those led by Constance, and their effect is altogether more subtle. In Act III, scene 3, King John persuades Hubert to murder Arthur. This is especially insidious as Arthur is onstage, entertained by his grandmother in the background. If it were not for this scene, it would be possible (though perhaps a distortion) to stage King John as a hero king. The scene, which is probably the play's most famous moment, crucially complicates John's character, placing him alongside despots like Richard III.

The scene opens in the heat of battle, with '*Alarums, excursions, retreat*' (III.3.0). King John faces a potent military threat to his rule, and there is a sense of urgency in the dialogue between him and Hubert. But it is not only words which have importance here; much must be conveyed through movement and expression. Although Arthur's one line generates sympathy for him from the beginning – in saying, 'O, this will make my mother die with grief!' (III.3.5), he offers a rare example of a character expressing consideration for someone else – Arthur's chief effect here is as a young child in peril, and this is forcefully represented simply by his bodily presence. With the boy in the background, King John is barely able to ask Hubert to kill Arthur, highlighting an inability to utter his intentions by repeating: 'I had a thing to say' (25, 33). The king relies more on insinuation than speech, and Hubert's response to King John's fears about Arthur is equally ambiguous: 'I'll keep him so | That he shall not offend your

majesty' (III.3.64–5). This can be delivered as a threat to Arthur's life or a promise to keep him safely. The dispositions of the actors convey much of the meaning here, as the characters struggle to express their intents non-verbally. Ultimately, this ambiguity forces King John to say the single, chilling word 'Death' in a one-line exchange that will settle Arthur's fate:

KING JOHN

Death.

HUBERT My lord.

KING JOHN

A grave.

HUBERT

He shall not live.

KING JOHN

Enough.

(III.3.66)

This line reduces language to its most basic elements, resolving the indirection of the earlier exchanges. While condemning King John to the role of anti-hero, the order for Arthur's death is one of the few moments in which he displays the political sophistication seemingly demanded by the world of the play.

These orders for Arthur's death, followed by Constance's great mourning scene, lead to the moving encounter of Arthur and his executioners. Again the physical disposition of bodies takes on greater importance than words, as the hot irons to be used for Arthur's blinding are potent reminders of corporeality. Arthur, wisely, continually focuses his attention on Hubert's body, 'Are you sick, Hubert? You look pale today' (IV.1.28), and on how Arthur has touched it tenderly in the past:

When your head did but ache,
I knit my handkercher about your brows –

...

And with my hand at midnight held your head ...

(IV.1.41–5)

In their only scene together, Arthur deflects attention from his young body in peril and generates a sense of long and intimate acquaintance with Hubert. For once in the play, Arthur speaks up, and he has a greater cause than anyone before him, because he pleads for his eyes. When his pleas are successful, it is probably one of the few moments in Shakespeare when the audience breathes a collective sigh of relief. The scene has as much dramatic tension as anything Shakespeare

wrote.

Paradoxically, the scene of Arthur's accidental death (IV.3) does not build a similarly powerful tension. Up to this point, the lynchpin in all of the key scenes is the young boy, and his death (and dead body on the stage) becomes a culmination of their dramatic force. But his death is especially difficult to stage because it requires a theatrically effective leap from his prison walls. Whether this fall is staged symbolically, as John Barton chose for his 1974 RSC production with a slowly floating and softly landing Arthur, or is done with more appearance of realism, as it probably was in Shakespeare's day, it is important to move the audience to horror at his unexpected death. Yet the shape of the scene makes such horror difficult to generate. Arthur speaks only ten lines: eight before he leaps and two as he lies dying. His innocent personifications of the ground and stones as his killers may be touching, but any sympathy generated for him is largely displaced by the immediate entry of Salisbury, Pembroke and Bigot, who do not find the body until twenty-five lines later. When they do find the dead Arthur, a few sympathetic words are expressed, but the lords quickly transform Arthur's death into an excuse for their revolt. Even Hubert is not given the chance to mourn for Arthur properly. Thus Arthur's near blinding is far more moving onstage than his actual death scene, pointing to the difficulty of dying well in this play, a problem that emerges again in the death of King John.

In contrast to Arthur's expedient fall, King John's death is protracted and full of angst. We first hear that his 'heart is sick' at V.3.4, but his death is delayed until four scenes later. When he dies in Act V, scene 7, we see one of the most horrific forms of death on the early modern stage: poisoning. He suffers greatly, and it is vexing for the actor to do so heroically. Yet his death speech, even with its heavy focus on his bodily pain, has moments of potential beauty:

I am a scribbled form, drawn with a pen
Upon a parchment, and against this fire
Do I shrink up. (V.7.32-4)

Much of the impact of this scene depends upon where King John has been represented on the continuum between hero and villain earlier in the play. As with Constance's laments, it is easy to push King John's speeches here to excess, even comically so, as physical pain is difficult to convey with dramatic dignity. His images of his own decaying body, 'my bowels crumble up to dust' and 'The tackle of my heart is

cracked and burnt' (31, 52), may more easily be rendered as coarse than moving. As a reviewer for *The Times* noted of Charles Kean's performance in 1852: 'it should always be borne in mind that this scene is an unkindly one to act' (*Shakespearean Criticism*, vol. 24, p. 193). Peter Thompson wrote of Patrick Stewart's 1970 RSC representation of the death that: 'I felt sorry for the actor, never for the king' (*Shakespearean Criticism*, vol. 24, p. 218). Whatever the production choices here, King John is at a disadvantage in the chivalric value system of the play; he does not die on the battlefield by the sword. In a play with few onstage deaths, his offers little scope for sympathy, as he probably expires silently in the background while the Bastard makes plans for England's defence. This denuded death may in part explain why actors have rarely found success in the part. Surprisingly, the oldest surviving scene of Shakespeare on film is a fragment representing King John's dying moments, as enacted by Herbert Beerbohm Tree in 1899. This extract seems to have been well received in tours of America and Britain, and the positive reception might stem from an almost exclusive focus on the king, as the Bastard's role was cut, bringing increased focus to John's death.

It is the Bastard who typically steals the scene at the end of the play, with his energy offering a poignant contrast to the king's helplessness. His importance at the beginning of the play comes from a choric function, which can be granted varying degrees of authority. Towards the end, his noble patriotism and active intervention bring him a more prominent political role. Onstage, however, many have found the Bastard's final speech disappointing, and actors are often most successful in the role when they emphasize subtlety over bluster. But disappointment with the ending is almost inherent in a play that has its most moving scenes in its central acts. The death of Arthur is a great loss to the dramatic tension of the play; the threat of the French, a possible additional source of conflict, is not fully contained. And although these lacunae are much less problematic on the stage, which does not require so linear a narrative as the page, it does mean that the play seems to lose steam in its closing acts.

In the end we are left with a very gentle closure. The battle scenes have no stage combat, facts are reported repeatedly and there is little sense of surprise. The play stimulates the audience with some of the most moving scenes in Shakespeare, and then softly allows the concerns they engender to disappear. This, coupled with the large number of lead parts, makes it difficult to achieve any kind of

traditionally tragic ending. The very unfamiliarity of the play has led generations of audiences to be pleasantly surprised at its dramatic effectiveness, but this effectiveness is negotiated moment by moment, rather than building up to a climactic finale.

Eugene Giddens

Further Reading

TEXT

The only authoritative text of *King John* is the 1623 first Folio of Shakespeare's works. It is conveniently available in *The Norton Facsimile: The First Folio of Shakespeare*, prepared by Charlton Hinman (1968; revised edn 1996). Universities are increasingly mounting facsimiles of the first Folio on their websites, but the fluidity of the internet may mean that no single address will permanently host such material. (See the Perseus Project at Tufts University at the Schoenberg Center for Electronic Text and Image and the University of Pennsylvania.) Two recent editions of *King John* include extended discussions of the Folio text: *The Life and Death of King John* (Oxford World's Classics), edited by A. R. Braunmuller (1989; 1994) and *King John* (New Cambridge Shakespeare), edited by L. A. Beaurline (1990). Both of these texts include sensitive introductions to the play and its performance history.

SOURCES, DATING AND BACKGROUND

Source material for *King John* is most fully treated in volume IV of Geoffrey Bullough's *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* (1962), pp. 1–151. He provides the full text of the anonymous 1591 play *The Troublesome Reign* and passages from Holinshed's *Chronicles*, Bale's *King Johan*, Foxe's *Acts and Monuments of Martyrs* and Hall's *Union of the Two Noble Families of Lancaster and York*.

The Appendix of this edition puts the case for considering *The Troublesome Reign* to be a source for *King John*. This ordering of these plays has been contested, however, most prominently by E. A. J. Honigsmann in a series of publications, including *Shakespeare's Impact on His Contemporaries* (1982) and 'Shakespeare's Self-Repetitions and *King John*', *Shakespeare Survey* 53 (2000), p. 83. For new evaluations of the evidence, see Brian Boyd, 'King John and *The Troublesome Reign*: Sources, Structure, Sequence', *Philological Quarterly* 74 (1995), pp. 37–56, who argues that *King John* precedes *The Troublesome Reign* because

the Bastard and Arthur are extraneous to the anonymous play. Rosalind King, in 'The Case for the Earlier Canon' (in *Shakespearean Continuities*, ed. John Batchelor, Tom Cain and Claire Lamont (1997), pp. 108–22), also argues that Shakespeare's play, and his Bastard, came first. John Klause is a recent exponent of the argument that *The Troublesome Reign* appeared before *King John* in his 'New Sources for Shakespeare's *King John*: The Writings of Robert Southwell', *Studies in Philology* 98 (2001), pp. 401–27, which suggests that Shakespeare's play must postdate *The Troublesome Reign* because it uses later sources from Southwell. Issues of dating are heavily related to the source debate, as any date after 1591 for *King John* means that it must come after *The Troublesome Reign*. William Shakespeare: *A Textual Companion*, edited by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (1987), offers extensive evidence for a post-1591 dating. MacDonald P. Jackson more recently argues that *King John* dates from the mid 1590s, too late to be the source of *The Troublesome Reign*, in 'Pause Patterns in Shakespeare's Verse: Canon and Chronology', *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 17 (2002), pp. 37–46.

CRITICISM

Joseph Candido's edition of *Shakespeare: The Critical Tradition*, 'King John' (1996) is an excellent way to access a wide range of critical perspectives on the play from 1790 to 1919. Deborah T. Curren-Aquino, 'King John': *New Perspectives* (1988), offers more recent interpretations. *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare's History Plays*, edited by Michael Hattaway (2002), gives helpful accounts of some cultural and theatrical considerations shaping Shakespeare's histories.

Other book-length studies of the histories with readings of *King John* include: E. M. W. Tillyard's *Shakespeare's History Plays* (1944); Lily B. Campbell, *Shakespeare's Histories* (1947; 1964); S. C. Sen Gupta's *Shakespeare's Historical Plays* (1964); H. M. Richmond's *Shakespeare's Political Plays* (1967); Emrys Jones, *Scenic Form in Shakespeare* (1971); and M. M. Reese's *The Cease of Majesty: A Study of Shakespeare's History Plays* (1972). More recent studies of the history plays with readings of *King John* include: Kristian Smidt, *Unconformities in Shakespeare's History Plays* (1982); P. Rackin, *Stages of History: Shakespeare's English Chronicles* (1990); D. G. Watson, *Shakespeare's Early History Plays: Politics at Play on the Elizabethan Stage* (1990); P. Pugliatti, *Shakespeare the Historian* (1996); and Jean E. Howard and

Phyllis Rackin, *Engendering a Nation: A Feminist Account of Shakespeare's English Histories* (1997).

There are several important shorter studies of the play. Adrien Bonjour, 'The Road to Swinstead Abbey: A Study of the Sense and Structure of *King John*', *ELH* 18 (1951), pp. 253–74, emphasizes its balanced structure. James L. Calderwood, 'Commodity and Honour in *King John*', *UTQ* 29 (1960), pp. 341–56, discusses notions of honour and political corruption in the play. Sigurd Burckhardt, in '*King John*: The Ordering of this Present Time', *ELH* 33 (1966), pp. 133–53, argues that *King John* discloses the need to suffer even poor rule at times of crisis. A. R. Braunmuller, in '*King John* and Historiography', *eLH* 55 (1988), pp. 309–32, discusses Shakespeare's use of Holinshed's *Chronicles* as a source. An excellent reading of politics in the play is David Womersley's 'The Politics of Shakespeare's *King John*', *Review of English Studies* 40 (1989), pp. 497–515. Juliet Dusinberre, in '*King John* and Embarrassing Women', *Shakespeare Survey* 42 (1990), pp. 37–52, notes the subversive power of the female characters. Robert Lane's "'The sequence of posterity": Shakespeare's *King John* and the Succession Controversy', *Studies in Philology* 92 (1995), pp. 460–81, highlights the play's relation to the end of Elizabeth's reign. Edward Gieskes, in "'He is but a bastard to the time": Status and Service in *The Troublesome Raigne of John* and Shakespeare's *King John*', *eLH* 65 (1998), pp. 779–98, points to differences between the two plays' bastards. Emrys Jones, in 'Reclaiming Early Shakespeare', *Essays in Criticism* 51 (2001), pp. 35–50, notes the increasing popularity of the play today and argues for an early date.

STAGE HISTORY

The best single source on the performance history of the play is Geraldine Cousin's '*King John*: Shakespeare in Performance' (1994). Eugene Waith's '*King John* and the Drama of History', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 29 (1978), pp. 192–211, discusses the play's performance history in terms of changing audience expectations. The stage history in L. A. Beaurline's New Cambridge Shakespeare edition, mentioned above, provides a good brief overview. An excellent collection of primary source material on the play's theatrical history can be found in *Shakespearean Criticism*, vol. 24, edited by Joseph C. Tardiff (1994). *Players of Shakespeare 6: Essays in the Performance of Shakespeare's History Plays*, edited by Robert Smallwood (2004), contains actors' accounts of performing roles in the play by Guy Henry, Kelly Hunter

and Jo Stone-Fewings. A facsimile of the prompt book for Macready's production is available in *William Charles Macready's 'King John'*, edited by Charles H. Shattuck (1962). The BBC television *King John*, directed by David Giles (1984), is the only production available for the screen, but *Silent Shakespeare* (British Film Institute, 1999) includes King John's death scene from Herbert Beerbohm Tree's 1899 film fragment.

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF KING JOHN

The Characters in the Play

THE ENGLISH PARTY

KING JOHN

PRINCE HENRY, son of King John, afterwards King Henry III

Earl of PEMBROKE

Earl of SALISBURY

Earl of ESSEX

Lord BIGOT

ROBERT FAULCONBRIDGE, son of Sir Robert Faulconbridge

Philip the BASTARD, his half-brother, revealed as the son of King
Richard Coeur-de-lion

HUBERT, a citizen of Angiers and afterwards a follower of King John

James GURNEY, a follower of Lady Faulconbridge

PETER OF POMFRET, a prophet

ENGLISH HERALD

An EXECUTIONER

A MESSENGER

QUEEN ELEANOR, mother of King John

BLANCHE of Spain, niece of King John

LADY FAULCONBRIDGE, widow of Sir Robert Faulconbridge

THE FRENCH PARTY

KING PHILIP II

LEWIS THE DAUPHIN

ARTHUR, Duke of Brittain (Brittany), nephew of King John

Archduke of AUSTRIA (Viscount of Limoges)

MELUN, a French lord

CHATILLON, ambassador from France to King John

FRENCH HERALD

A MESSENGER

CONSTANCE, mother of Arthur

THE POPE'S LEGATE

CARDINAL PANDULPH

Lords, a sheriff, soldiers, executioners, attendants

I.1 Enter *King John, Queen Eleanor, Pembroke, Essex,
and Salisbury, with Chatillon of France*

KING JOHN

Now say, *Chatillon*, what would France with us?

CHATILLON

Thus, after greeting, speaks the King of France,
In my behaviour, to the majesty,
The *borrowed majesty*, of England here.

QUEEN ELEANOR

A strange beginning – ‘borrowed majesty’!

KING JOHN

Silence, good mother. Hear the *embassy*.

CHATILLON

Philip of France, *in right and true behalf*
Of *thy deceased brother Geoffrey’s* son,
Arthur Plantagenet, lays most lawful claim

- 10 To this fair island and the *territories*,
To Ireland, *Poitiers, Anjou, Touraine, Maine*,
Desiring thee to lay aside the *sword*
Which *sways* usurpingly these *several titles*,
And put the same into young Arthur’s hand,
Thy nephew and right royal sovereign.

KING JOHN

What follows if we *disallow* of this?

CHATILLON

The *proud control* of fierce and bloody war,
To enforce these rights so forcibly withheld.

KING JOHN

- Here have we war for war and blood for blood,
20 *Controlment for controlment*. So answer France.

CHATILLON

Then take my King’s defiance from my mouth,
The farthest limit of my embassy.

KING JOHN

Bear mine to him, and so depart in peace.
Be thou *as lightning* in the eyes of France;
For *ere thou canst report* I will be there,
The thunder of my *cannon* shall be heard.
So, hence! Be thou the *trumpet of our wrath*
And *sullen presage of your own decay*.
An honourable *conduct* let him have.

30 Pembroke, look to't. Farewell, Chatillon.

Exeunt Chatillon and Pembroke

QUEEN ELEANOR

What now, my son? Have I not ever said
How that ambitious Constance would not cease
Till she had kindled France and all the world
Upon the right and party of her son?
This might have been prevented and made whole
With very easy arguments of love,
Which now the manage of two kingdoms must
With fearful bloody issue arbitrate.

KING JOHN

Our strong possession and our right for us.

QUEEN ELEANOR (*to King John*)

40 Your strong possession much more than your right,
Or else it must go wrong with you and me.
So much my conscience whispers in your ear,
Which none but heaven, and you and I, shall hear.

Enter a sheriff, who whispers to Essex

ESSEX

My liege, here is the strangest controversy,
Come from the country to be judged by you,
That e'er I heard. Shall I produce the men?

KING JOHN

Let them approach.

Exit sheriff

Our abbeys and our priories shall pay
This expeditious charge.

Enter Robert Faulconbridge and Philip, his bastard brother
What men are you?

BASTARD

50 Your faithful subject I, a gentleman,
Born in Northamptonshire, and eldest son,
As I suppose, to Robert Faulconbridge,
A soldier, by the honour-giving hand
Of Coeur-de-lion knighted in the field.

KING JOHN

What art thou?

ROBERT FAULCONBRIDGE

The son and heir to that same Faulconbridge.

KING JOHN

Is that the elder, and art thou the heir?
You came not of one mother then, it seems.

BASTARD

Most certain of one mother, mighty King –

- 60 That is **well known**; and, as I think, one father.
But **for the certain knowledge** of that truth
I **put you o'er** to heaven, and to my mother;
Of that I doubt, as all men's children may.

QUEEN ELEANOR

Out on thee, rude man! Thou dost shame thy mother,
And wound her honour, with this **diffidence**.

BASTARD

I, madam? No, I have no reason for it.
That is my brother's plea, and none of mine;
The which if he can prove, '**a pops me out**
At least from **fair five hundred pound** a year.

- 70 Heaven guard my mother's honour, and my land!

KING JOHN

A good **blunt** fellow! **Why, being younger born**,
Doth he lay claim to thine inheritance?

BASTARD

I know not why, except to get the land –
But **once** he slandered me with bastardy.
But whe'er I be as true begot or no,
That still I lay upon my mother's head.
But that I am as well begot, my liege –
Fair fall the bones that took the pains for me! –
Compare our faces and be judge yourself.

- 80 If old Sir Robert did beget us both
And were our father, and this son like him,
O old Sir Robert, father, on my knee
I give heaven thanks I was not like to thee!

KING JOHN

Why, what a madcap hath heaven lent us here!

QUEEN ELEANOR (*to King John*)

He hath a trick of Coeur-de-lion's face;
The accent of his tongue **affecteth** him.
Do you not **read** some **tokens** of my son
In the **large composition** of this man?

KING JOHN (*to Queen Eleanor*)

Mine eye hath well examinèd his **parts**

- 90 And finds them **perfect Richard**. (*To Robert Faulcon-*
bridge) **Sirrah**, speak.

What doth move you to claim your brother's land?

BASTARD (*aside*)

Because he hath a half-face like my father!

With half that face would he have all my land –

A half-faced groat, five hundred pound a year!

ROBERT FAULCONBRIDGE

My gracious liege, when that my father lived,

Your brother did employ my father much –

BASTARD (*aside*)

Well, sir, by this you cannot get my land.

Your tale must be how he employed my mother.

ROBERT FAULCONBRIDGE

– And once dispatched him in an embassy

100 To Germany, there with the Emperor

To treat of high affairs touching that time.

Th'advantage of his absence took the King

And in the meantime sojourned at my father's,

Where how he did prevail I shame to speak –

But truth is truth. Large lengths of seas and shores

Between my father and my mother lay,

As I have heard my father speak himself,

When this same lusty gentleman was got.

Upon his death-bed he by will bequeathed

110 His lands to me, and took it on his death

That this, my mother's son, was none of his;

And if he were, he came into the world

Full fourteen weeks before the course of time.

Then, good my liege, let me have what is mine,

My father's land, as was my father's will.

KING JOHN

Sirrah, your brother is legitimate.

Your father's wife did after wedlock bear him,

And if she did play false, the fault was hers –

Which fault lies on the hazards of all husbands

120 That marry wives. Tell me, how if my brother,

Who, as you say, took pains to get this son,

Had of your father claimed this son for his?

In sooth, good friend, your father might have kept

This calf, bred from his cow, from all the world;

In sooth he might. Then, if he were my brother's,

My brother might not claim him, nor your father,

Being none of his, refuse him. This concludes:

My mother's son did get your father's heir;

Your father's heir must have your father's land.

ROBERT FAULCONBRIDGE

130 Shall then my father's will be of no force

To dispossess that child which is not his?

BASTARD

Of no more force to dispossess me, sir,

Than was his will to get me, as I think.

QUEEN ELEANOR

Whether hadst thou rather be: a Faulconbridge,

And like thy brother, to enjoy thy land;

Or the reputed son of Coeur-de-lion,

Lord of thy presence, and no land beside?

BASTARD

Madam, an if my brother had my shape

And I had his – Sir Robert's his, like him;

140 And if my legs were two such riding-rods,

My arms such eel-skins stuffed, my face so thin

That in mine ear I durst not stick a rose

Lest men should say 'Look where three-farthings goes!'

And, to his shape, were heir to all this land –

Would I might never stir from off this place,

I would give it every foot to have this face;

I would not be Sir Nob in any case!

QUEEN ELEANOR

I like thee well. Wilt thou forsake thy fortune,

Bequeath thy land to him, and follow me?

150 I am a soldier and now bound to France.

BASTARD

Brother, take you my land. I'll take my chance.

Your face hath got five hundred pound a year,

Yet sell your face for fivepence and 'tis dear.

Madam, I'll follow you unto the death.

QUEEN ELEANOR

Nay, I would have you go before me thither.

BASTARD

Our country manners give our betters way.

KING JOHN

What is thy name?

BASTARD

Philip, my liege, so is my name begun;

Philip, good old Sir Robert's wife's eldest son.

KING JOHN

160 From henceforth bear his name whose form thou
bearest:

Kneel thou down Philip, but rise more great –
Arise Sir Richard, and Plantagenet.

BASTARD

Brother, by th'mother's side, give me your hand.
My father gave me honour, yours gave land.
Now blessèd be the [hour](#), by night or day,
When I was got, Sir Robert was away!

QUEEN ELEANOR

The very spirit of Plantagenet!
I am thy [grandam](#), Richard. Call me so.

BASTARD

[Madam, by chance but not by truth; what though?](#)

170 [Something about, a little from the right,](#)
[In at the window, or else o'er the hatch;](#)
[Who dares not stir by day must walk by night,](#)
[And have is have, however men do catch;](#)
[Near or far off, well won is still well shot,](#)
[And I am I, howe'er I was begot.](#)

KING JOHN

Go, Faulconbridge. Now hast thou thy desire;
[A landless knight makes thee a landed squire.](#)
Come, madam, and come, Richard, we must speed
For France, for France, for it is more than need.

BASTARD

180 Brother, adieu. [Good fortune come](#) to thee,
For thou wast got i'th'way of honesty!

Exeunt all but the Bastard

[A foot of honour](#) better than I was,
But [many a many](#) foot of land the worse!
Well, now can I [make any Joan a lady.](#)
'[Good den](#), Sir Richard' – '[God 'a' mercy, fellow](#)' –
And if his name be George, I'll call him Peter;
For [new-made honour](#) doth forget men's names –
'Tis too respective and too sociable
For [your conversion](#). [Now your traveller](#),

190 He and his [toothpick at my worship's mess](#),
And when my knightly stomach is sufficed,
Why then I [suck my teeth](#) and [catechize](#)
My [pickèd man of countries](#): 'My dear sir' –
Thus, [leaning on mine elbow](#), I begin –
'I shall beseech you' – [that is question now](#);
And then comes answer [like an Absey book](#):

‘O sir,’ says answer, ‘at your best command;
At your employment, at your service, sir.’
‘No sir,’ says question, ‘I, sweet sir, at yours.’

200 And so, ere answer knows what question *would*,

Saving in dialogue of compliment,
And talking of *the Alps and Apennines*,
The Pyrenean and the River Po,
It draws *toward supper* in conclusion so.
But this is worshipful society,
And *fits the mounting spirit like myself*;
For *he is but a bastard* to the time
That doth not *smack* of observation.

And so am I – whether I smack or no,

210 And not alone in *habit and device*,
Exterior form, *outward accoutrement*,
But from *the inward motion – to deliver*
Sweet, sweet, *sweet poison for the age’s tooth*;
Which, though I will not *practise* to deceive,
Yet to avoid *deceit* I mean to learn;
For *it shall strew the footsteps of my rising*.
But who comes in such haste in riding robes?
What *woman-post* is this? Hath she no husband
That will *take pains to blow a horn before her*?

Enter Lady Faulconbridge and James Gurney

220 O me, ’tis my mother! How now, *good lady*?
What brings you here to court so hastily?

LADY FAULCONBRIDGE

Where is that slave thy brother? Where is he
That *holds in chase mine honour* up and down?

BASTARD

My brother Robert? Old Sir Robert’s son?
Colbrand the Giant, that same mighty man?
Is it Sir Robert’s son that you seek so?

LADY FAULCONBRIDGE

Sir Robert’s son? – Ay, thou unreverend boy,
Sir Robert’s son. *Why scornest thou* at Sir Robert?
He is Sir Robert’s son, and so art thou.

BASTARD

230 James Gurney, wilt thou *give us leave* a while?

GURNEY

Good leave, good *Philip*.

BASTARD

Philip? – Sparrow! James,
There's toys abroad. Anon I'll tell thee more.

Exit Gurney

Madam, I was not old Sir Robert's son.
Sir Robert might have eat his part in me
Upon Good Friday and ne'er broke his fast.
Sir Robert could do well – marry, to confess –
Could he get me! Sir Robert could not do it!
We know his handiwork. Therefore, good mother,
To whom am I beholding for these limbs?

240 Sir Robert never help to make this leg.

LADY FAULCONBRIDGE

Hast thou conspirèd with thy brother too,
That for thine own gain shouldst defend mine honour?
What means this scorn, thou most untoward knave?

BASTARD

Knight, knight, good mother, Basilisco-like!
What! I am dubbed, I have it on my shoulder.
But, mother, I am not Sir Robert's son.
I have disclaimed Sir Robert and my land;
Legitimation, name, and all is gone.

Then, good my mother, let me know my father;

250 Some proper man, I hope. Who was it, mother?

LADY FAULCONBRIDGE

Hast thou denied thyself a Faulconbridge?

BASTARD

As faithfully as I deny the devil.

LADY FAULCONBRIDGE

King Richard Coeur-de-lion was thy father.
By long and vehement suit I was seduced
To make room for him in my husband's bed.
Heaven lay not my transgression to my charge!
Thou art the issue of my dear offence,
Which was so strongly urged past my defence.

BASTARD

Now by this light, were I to get again,

260 Madam, I would not wish a better father.

Some sins do bear their privilege on earth,
And so doth yours. Your fault was not your folly.
Needs must you lay your heart at his dispose,
Subjected tribute to commanding love,
Against whose fury and unmatched force

The aweless lion could not wage the fight,
Nor keep his princely heart from Richard's hand.
He that **performe** robs lions of their hearts
May easily win a woman's. Ay, my mother,
270 With all **my heart** I thank thee for my father.
Who lives and dares but say thou **didst** not well
When I was got, **I'll send his soul to hell**.
Come, lady, I will show thee to **my kin**,
And they shall say, when Richard me begot,
If thou hadst said him nay, it had been sin.
Who says it was, he lies – I say 'twas not!

Exeunt

*

*II.1 Enter on one side King Philip of France, Lewis the
Dauphin, Constance, Arthur, lords, and soldiers; on
the other side the Archduke of Austria and soldiers*

KING PHILIP

Before Angiers well met, brave Austria.
Arthur, that great **forerunner of thy blood**,
Richard, that **robbed the lion of his heart**
And **fought the holy wars in Palestine**,
By this brave duke came early to his grave.
And for amends to his posterity,
At our **importance** hither is he come
To **spread his colours**, boy, in thy behalf,
And to **rebuke** the **usurpation**
10 Of thy **unnatural** uncle, English John.
Embrace him, love him, give him welcome hither.

ARTHUR

God shall forgive you Coeur-de-lion's death
The rather that you give his offspring life,
Shadowing their right under your wings of war.
I give you welcome with a **powerless** hand,
But with a heart full of **unstained** love.
Welcome before the gates of Angiers, Duke!

KING PHILIP

A noble boy! Who would not **do thee right**!

AUSTRIA

Upon thy cheek lay I this **zealous** kiss,

20 As seal to this indenture of my love:
That to my home I will no more return
Till Angiers and the right thou hast in France,
Together with that pale, that white-faced shore,
Whose foot spurns back the ocean's roaring tides
And coops from other lands her islanders,
Even till that England, hedged in with the main,
That water-walled bulwark, still secure
And confident from foreign purposes,
Even till that utmost corner of the west

30 Salute thee for her king. Till then, fair boy,
Will I not think of home, but follow arms.

CONSTANCE

O, take his mother's thanks, a widow's thanks,
Till your strong hand shall help to give him strength
To make a more requital to your love.

AUSTRIA

The peace of heaven is theirs that lift their swords
In such a just and charitable war.

KING PHILIP

Well then, to work! Our cannon shall be bent
Against the brows of this resisting town.
Call for our chiefest men of discipline,

40 To cull the plots of best advantages.
We'll lay before this town our royal bones,
Wade to the market-place in Frenchmen's blood,
But we will make it subject to this boy.

CONSTANCE

Stay for an answer to your embassy,
Lest unadvised you stain your swords with blood.
My Lord Chatillon may from England bring
That right in peace which here we urge in war,
And then we shall repent each drop of blood
That hot rash haste so indirectly shed.

Enter Chatillon

KING PHILIP

50 A wonder, lady! Lo, upon thy wish,
Our messenger Chatillon is arrived.
What England says, say briefly, gentle lord;
We coldly pause for thee. Chatillon, speak.

CHATILLON

Then turn your forces from this paltry siege

And stir them up against a mightier task.
England, impatient of your just demands,
Hath put himself in arms. The adverse winds,
Whose leisure I have stayed, have given him time
To land his legions all as soon as I.

- 60 His marches are expedient to this town,
His forces strong, his soldiers confident.
With him along is come the Mother-Queen,
An Ate, stirring him to blood and strife;
With her her niece, the Lady Blanche of Spain;
With them a bastard of the King's deceased.
And all th'unsettled humours of the land –
Rash, inconsiderate, fiery voluntaries,
With ladies' faces and fierce dragons' spleens –
Have sold their fortunes at their native homes,
70 Bearing their birthrights proudly on their backs,
To make a hazard of new fortunes here.
In brief, a braver choice of dauntless spirits
Than now the English bottoms have waft o'er
Did never float upon the swelling tide
To do offence and scathe in Christendom.

A drum beats

The interruption of their churlish drums
Cuts off more circumstance. They are at hand –
To parley or to fight! Therefore prepare!

KING PHILIP

How much unlooked-for is this expedition!

AUSTRIA

- 80 By how much unexpected, by so much
We must awake endeavour for defence;
For courage mounteth with occasion.
Let them be welcome then. We are prepared!

*Enter King John, Queen Eleanor, Blanche, the
Bastard, lords, and soldiers*

KING JOHN

Peace be to France – if France in peace permit
Our just and lineal entrance to our own.
If not, bleed France, and peace ascend to heaven,
Whiles we, God's wrathful agent, do correct
Their proud contempt that beats His peace to heaven.

KING PHILIP

Peace be to England – if that war return

- 90 From France to England, there to live in peace.
England we love, and for that England's sake
With burden of our armour here we sweat.
This toil of ours should be a work of thine;
But thou from loving England art so far
That thou hast underwrought his lawful king,
Cut off the sequence of posterity,
Outfaced infant state, and done a rape
Upon the maiden virtue of the crown.
Look here upon thy brother Geoffrey's face.
- 100 These eyes, these brows, were moulded out of his;
This little abstract doth contain that large
Which died in Geoffrey; and the hand of time
Shall draw this brief into as huge a volume.
That Geoffrey was thy elder brother born,
And this his son. England was Geoffrey's right,
And this is Geoffrey's. In the name of God
How comes it then that thou art called a king,
When living blood doth in these temples beat
Which owe the crown that thou o'ermasterest?

KING JOHN

- 110 From whom hast thou this great commission, France,
To draw my answer from thy articles?

KING PHILIP

From that supernal judge that stirs good thoughts
In any breast of strong authority
To look into the blots and stains of right.
That judge hath made me guardian to this boy:
Under whose warrant I impeach thy wrong
And by whose help I mean to chastise it.

KING JOHN

Alack, thou dost usurp authority.

KING PHILIP

Excuse it is to beat usurping down.

QUEEN ELEANOR

- 120 Who is it thou dost call usurper, France?

CONSTANCE

Let me make answer: thy usurping son.

QUEEN ELEANOR

Out, insolent! Thy bastard shall be king
That thou mayst be a queen and check the world.

CONSTANCE

My bed was ever to thy son as true

As thine was to thy husband; and this boy
Liker in feature to his father Geoffrey
Than thou and John in manners – being as like
As rain to water or devil to his dam!
My boy a bastard! By my soul, I think

130 His father never was so true begot.

It cannot be, an if thou wert his mother.

QUEEN ELEANOR

There's a good mother, boy, that blots thy father.

CONSTANCE

There's a good grandam, boy, that would blot thee.

AUSTRIA

Peace!

BASTARD

Hear the crier!

AUSTRIA

What the devil art thou?

BASTARD

One that will play the devil, sir, with you,

An 'a may catch your hide and you alone.

You are the hare of whom the proverb goes,

Whose valour plucks dead lions by the beard.

I'll smoke your skin-coat an I catch you right!

140 Sirrah, look to't! I'faith I will, i'faith!

BLANCHE

O, well did he become that lion's robe

That did disrobe the lion of that robe!

BASTARD

It lies as sightly on the back of him

As great Alcides' shows upon an ass.

But, ass, I'll take that burden from your back,

Or lay on that shall make your shoulders crack.

AUSTRIA

What cracker is this same that deafs our ears

With this abundance of superfluous breath?

King Philip, determine what we shall do straight.

KING PHILIP

150 Women and fools, break off your conference!

King John, this is the very sum of all:

England and Ireland, Anjou, Touraine, Maine,

In right of Arthur do I claim of thee.

Wilt thou resign them and lay down thy arms?

KING JOHN

My life as soon! I do defy thee, France.

Arthur of Brittaine, yield thee to my hand,
And out of my dear love I'll give thee more
Than e'er the coward hand of France can win.
Submit thee, boy.

QUEEN ELEANOR

160 Come to thy grandam, child.

CONSTANCE

Do, child, go to [it](#) grandam, child.
Give grandam kingdom, and it grandam will
Give it a plum, a cherry, and a fig.
There's a good grandam.

ARTHUR

[Good my mother](#), peace!
I would that I were low laid in my grave.
I am not worth this [coil](#) that's made for me.

QUEEN ELEANOR

His mother shames him so, poor boy, he weeps.

CONSTANCE

Now shame upon you, whe'er she does or no!
His grandam's [wrongs](#), and not his mother's [shames](#),
[Draws](#) those [heaven-moving pearls](#) from his poor eyes,

170 Which heaven shall take [in nature of a fee](#) –

Ay, with these [crystal beads](#) heaven shall be bribed
To do him justice and revenge on you.

QUEEN ELEANOR

Thou monstrous [slanderer of heaven and earth](#)!

CONSTANCE

Thou monstrous [injurer of heaven and earth](#)!
Call not me slanderer! [Thou and thine](#) usurp
The [dominations](#), [royalties](#), and rights
Of this oppressèd boy. This is thy [eldest son's son](#),
[Infortunate in nothing but in thee](#).
[Thy sins are visited in this poor child](#);

180 [The canon of the law](#) is laid on him,

Being but the second generation
Removèd from thy [sin-conceiving womb](#).

KING JOHN

[Bedlam](#), have done!

CONSTANCE

I have but this to say:
[That he is not only plaguèd for her sin](#),
But God hath made her sin and her the plague
On this [removèd issue](#), plagued for her

And with her plague; her sin his injury,
Her injury the beadle to her sin,
All punished in the person of this child,
190 And all for her. A plague upon her!

QUEEN ELEANOR

Thou **unadvised scold**, I can produce
A will that bars the title of thy son.

CONSTANCE

Ay, who doubts that! A **will**, a wicked will!
A woman's will, a cankered grandam's will!

KING PHILIP

Peace, lady! Pause, or be more temperate.
It ill beseems **this presence to cry aim**
To these ill-tuned **repetitions**.
Some **trumpet** summon hither to the walls
These men of Angiers. Let us hear them speak
200 Whose title they **admit**, Arthur's or John's.

A trumpet sounds
Enter Hubert upon the walls

HUBERT

Who is it that hath **warned** us to the walls?

KING PHILIP

'Tis France, for England.

KING JOHN

England, for itself.

You men of Angiers, and my loving subjects –

KING PHILIP

You loving men of Angiers, Arthur's subjects,
Our trumpet called you to this gentle **parle** –

KING JOHN

For our **advantage**; therefore hear us first.
These flags of France, that are advanced here
Before **the eye and prospect of your town**,
Have hither marched **to your endamagement**.
210 The cannons have their **bowels** full of wrath,
And ready mounted are they to spit forth
Their **iron indignation** 'gainst your walls.
All preparation for a bloody siege
And merciless **proceeding** by these French
Confronts your city's eyes, your winking gates;
And but for our approach those sleeping **stones**,
That as a **waist doth** girdle you about,
By the compulsion of their **ordinance**

By this time [from their fixèd beds of lime](#)
220 Had been dishabited, and wide havoc made
For bloody power to rush upon your peace.
But on the sight of us your lawful King,
Who [painfully, with much expedient march,](#)
[Have brought a countercheck](#) before your gates,
To save unscratched [your city's threatened cheeks,](#)
Behold, the French, [amazed,](#) vouchsafe a parle.
And now, [instead of bullets](#) wrapped in fire,
To make a shaking fever in your walls,
They shoot but calm words folded up in smoke,
230 To make a faithless error in your ears;
Which [trust accordingly,](#) kind citizens,
And let [us](#) in – your King, whose [laboured spirits,](#)
[Forwearied](#) in this action of swift speed,
[Craves harbourage](#) within your city walls.

KING PHILIP

When I have [said,](#) make answer to us both.
Lo, in this right hand, whose protection
Is most divinely vowed [upon the right](#)
Of him it holds, stands young Plantagenet,
Son to the elder brother of this man,
240 And king o'er him and all that he [enjoys.](#)
[For this downtrodden equity we tread](#)
In warlike march these greens before your town,
Being [no further enemy to you](#)
Than the constraint of hospitable [zeal](#)
In the relief of this oppressèd child
Religiously provokes. Be pleasèd then
To pay that duty which you truly owe
To him that [owes](#) it, namely this young prince.
And then our arms, like to a [muzzled bear,](#)
250 [Save in aspect, hath](#) all [offence](#) sealed up;
[Our cannons' malice](#) vainly shall be spent
Against th'invulnerable clouds of heaven;
And with [a blessèd and unvexed retire,](#)
With [unhacked swords](#) and helmets all [unbruised,](#)
We will bear home that [lusty blood](#) again
Which here we came to spout against your town,
And leave your children, wives, and you, in peace.
But if you [fondly pass](#) our proffered offer,

'Tis not the roundure of your old-faced walls
260 Can hide you from our messengers of war,
Though all these English and their discipline
Were harboured in their rude circumference.
Then tell us, shall your city call us lord
In that behalf which we have challenged it,
Or shall we give the signal to our rage
And stalk in blood to our possession?

HUBERT

In brief, we are the King of England's subjects;
For him, and in his right, we hold this town.

KING JOHN

Acknowledge then the King, and let me in.

HUBERT

270 That can we not. But he that proves the King,
To him will we prove loyal. Till that time
Have we rammed up our gates against the world.

KING JOHN

Doth not the crown of England prove the King?
And if not that, I bring you witnesses,
Twice fifteen thousand hearts of England's breed –

BASTARD (*aside*)

Bastards and else!

KING JOHN

– To verify our title with their lives.

KING PHILIP

As many and as well-born bloods as those –

BASTARD (*aside*)

Some bastards too!

KING PHILIP

280 – Stand in his face to contradict his claim.

HUBERT

Till you compound whose right is worthiest,
We, for the worthiest, hold the right from both.

KING JOHN

Then God forgive the sin of all those souls
That to their everlasting residence,
Before the dew of evening fall, shall fleet,
In dreadful trial of our kingdom's king.

KING PHILIP

Amen, amen! Mount, chevaliers! To arms!

BASTARD

Saint George, that swunged the dragon, and e'er since
Sits on's horseback at mine hostess' door,

290 Teach us some fence! (*To Austria*) Sirrah, were I at home

At your den, sirrah, with your lioness,
I would set an ox-head to your lion's hide,
And make a monster of you.

AUSTRIA

Peace! No more.

BASTARD

O, tremble, for you hear the lion roar!

KING JOHN

Up higher to the plain, where we'll set forth
In best appointment all our regiments.

BASTARD

Speed then, to take advantage of the field.

KING PHILIP

It shall be so. And at the other hill

Command the rest to stand. God and our right!

Exeunt all but Hubert – King John and

his followers on one side, King Philip

and his followers on the other

*After excursions, enter the Herald of France, with
trumpeters, to the gates*

FRENCH HERALD

300 You men of Angiers, open wide your gates

And let young Arthur Duke of Brittain in,
Who by the hand of France this day hath made
Much work for tears in many an English mother,
Whose sons lie scattered on the bleeding ground;
Many a widow's husband grovelling lies,
Coldly embracing the discoloured earth;
And victory with little loss doth play
Upon the dancing banners of the French,
Who are at hand, triumphantly displayed,

310 To enter conquerors and to proclaim

Arthur of Brittain England's king and yours.

Enter English Herald with trumpeters

ENGLISH HERALD

Rejoice, you men of Angiers, ring your bells!
King John, your king and England's, doth approach,
Commander of this hot malicious day.
Their armours that marched hence so silver-bright
Hither return all gilt with Frenchmen's blood.
There stuck no plume in any English crest

That is removed by a [staff](#) of France;
[Our colours](#) do return in those same hands
320 That did display them when we first marched forth;
And [like a jolly troop of huntsmen](#) come
Our [lusty](#) English, all with purpled hands,
Dyed in the dying slaughter of their foes.
Open your gates and [give the victors way](#).

HUBERT

Heralds, from off our towers we might behold,
From first to last, the [onset and retire](#)
Of both your armies; [whose equality](#)
By our best eyes cannot be censurèd.
Blood hath bought blood and blows have answered
blows,
330 Strength matched with strength and power confronted
power.
[Both are alike, and both alike we like](#).
One must prove greatest; while they weigh so even,
We hold our town for neither, yet for both.

*[Enter on one side](#) King John, Queen Eleanor, Blanche,
the Bastard, lords, and soldiers; [on the other side](#)
King Philip, Lewis the Dauphin, Austria, lords, and
soldiers*

KING JOHN

France, hast thou yet more blood to cast away?
[Say, shall the current of our right run](#) on,
Whose [passage](#), vexed with thy impediment,
Shall leave his [native channel](#) and o'er-swell,
With course disturbed, even [thy confining shores](#),
Unless thou let his silver water keep
340 A peaceful progress to the [ocean](#)?

KING PHILIP

England, thou hast not saved one drop of blood,
In this hot trial, more than we of France;
Rather, lost more. And [by this hand I swear](#),
That sways the earth this climate overlooks,
[Before we will lay down](#) our just-borne arms,
We'll put thee down, 'gainst whom these arms we bear,
Or add a royal number to the dead,
Gracing the scroll that tells of this war's loss
With slaughter coupled to the name of kings.

BASTARD

- 350 Ha, majesty! How high thy glory towers
When the rich blood of kings is set on fire!
O, now doth death line his dead **chaps** with steel;
The swords of soldiers are his teeth, his fangs.
And now he feasts, mousing the flesh of men,
In **undetermined differences** of kings.
Why stand these royal fronts amazed thus?
Cry havoc, Kings! Back to the **stained** field,
You **equal potents**, fiery-kindled **spirits**!
Then let **confusion** of one **part** confirm
- 360 The other's peace. Till then, blows, blood, and death!
KING JOHN
Whose party do the townsmen **yet** admit?
KING PHILIP
Speak, citizens, for England. Who's your king?
HUBERT
The King of England, when we know the King.
KING PHILIP
Know him in us, that here **hold up his right**.
KING JOHN
In us, that are **our own great deputy**
And **bear possession of our person** here,
Lord of our presence, Angiers, and of you.
HUBERT
A greater power than we denies all this.
And, till it be undoubted, we do lock
- 370 Our former scruple in our strong-barred gates;
Kings of our fear, until our fears, resolved,
Be by some certain king purged and deposed.
BASTARD
By heaven, these **scroyles** of Angiers flout you, Kings,
And stand securely on their battlements
As in a theatre, whence they gape and point
At **your industrious scenes and acts** of death.
Your royal presences, be ruled by me:
Do like the **mutines of Jerusalem**,
Be friends awhile, and both **conjointly bend**
- 380 Your sharpest deeds of malice on this town.
By east and west let France and England mount
Their battering cannon chargèd to the mouths,
Till their **soul-fearing** clamours have **brawled down**
The flinty ribs of this contemptuous city.
I'd **play** incessantly upon these **jades**,

Even till unfencèd desolation
Leave them as naked as the vulgar air.
That done, dissever your united strengths
And part your mingled colours once again;
390 Turn face to face and bloody point to point.
Then, in a moment, fortune shall cull forth
Out of one side her happy minion,
To whom in favour she shall give the day,
And kiss him with a glorious victory.
How like you this wild counsel, mighty states?
Smacks it not something of the policy?

KING JOHN

Now, by the sky that hangs above our heads,
I like it well! France, shall we knit our powers
And lay this Angiers even with the ground,
400 Then after fight who shall be king of it?

BASTARD (*to King Philip*)

An if thou hast the mettle of a king,
Being wronged as we are by this peevish town,
Turn thou the mouth of thy artillery,
As we will ours, against these saucy walls;
And when that we have dashed them to the ground,
Why, then defy each other, and pell-mell
Make work upon ourselves, for heaven or hell.

KING PHILIP

Let it be so. Say, where will you assault?

KING JOHN

We from the west will send destruction
410 Into this city's bosom.

AUSTRIA

I from the north.

KING PHILIP

Our thunder from the south
Shall rain their drift of bullets on this town.

BASTARD (*aside*)

O prudent discipline! From north to south
Austria and France shoot in each other's mouth.
I'll stir them to it. Come, away, away!

HUBERT

Hear us, great Kings! Vouchsafe a while to stay,
And I shall show you peace and fair-faced league,
Win you this city without stroke or wound,

Rescue those [breathing lives](#) to die in beds

420 That here [come sacrifices for the field](#).

[Persever](#) not, but hear me, mighty Kings!

KING JOHN

Speak on with favour. We are [bent to hear](#).

HUBERT

That daughter there of Spain, the Lady Blanche,

Is [niece](#) to England. [Look upon the years](#)

Of Lewis the [Dauphin](#) and that lovely maid.

If [lusty](#) love should go in quest of beauty,

Where should he find it fairer than in Blanche?

If [zealous](#) love should go in search of virtue,

Where should he find it purer than in Blanche?

430 If love ambitious sought a [match of birth](#),

Whose veins [bound](#) richer blood than Lady Blanche?

Such as she is, in beauty, virtue, birth,

Is the young Dauphin every way [complete](#).

[If not complete of, say](#) he is not she;

And she again wants nothing, to name want,

If want it be not that she is not he.

[He is the half part](#) of a blessèd man,

Left to be finishèd by such [as she](#);

And [she a fair divided excellence](#),

440 Whose fullness of perfection lies in him.

O, two such [silver currents](#), when they join,

Do [glorify the banks that bound them in](#);

And two such shores to two such streams made one,

Two such [controlling bounds](#), shall you be, Kings,

To these two princes, if you marry them.

This union shall do more than battery can

To our fast-closèd gates. For at this [match](#),

With [swifter spleen](#) than powder can enforce,

The [mouth of passage](#) shall we fling wide ope

450 And give you entrance. [But without this match](#),

The sea enraged is not half so deaf,

Lions more confident, mountains and rocks

More free from motion, no, not death himself

In mortal fury half so [peremptory](#),

As we to keep this city.

BASTARD (*aside*)

[Here's a stay](#)

That [shakes the rotten carcass of old death](#)
Out of his rags! Here's a [large mouth](#), indeed,
That spits forth death and mountains, rocks and seas,
Talks as familiarly of roaring lions

- 460 As maids of thirteen do of puppy-dogs.
What cannoneer begot this [lusty blood](#)?
[He speaks plain cannon](#) – fire and smoke and [bounce](#);
He [gives the bastinado](#) with his tongue.
Our ears are cudgelled; not a word of his
But buffets better than a fist of France.
[Zounds!](#) I was never so bethumped with words
[Since I first called my brother's father dad!](#)

QUEEN ELEANOR (*to King John*)

- [Son, list to this conjunction](#), make this match;
Give with our niece [a dowry large enough](#).
470 For by this knot thou shalt so [surely tie](#)
Thy now unsured assurance to the crown
That [yon green boy](#) shall have no [sun](#) to ripe
The [bloom](#) that promiseth a mighty fruit.
I see a [yielding](#) in the looks of France;
Mark how they whisper. Urge them while their souls
Are [capable of this ambition](#),
Lest [zeal](#), now melted by the windy breath
Of soft petitions, pity, and remorse,
Cool and congeal again to what it was.

HUBERT

- 480 Why answer not the double majesties
This friendly [treaty](#) of our threatened town?

KING PHILIP

Speak [England first, that hath been forward first](#)
To speak unto this city. What say you?

KING JOHN

- If that the Dauphin there, thy princely son,
Can in [this book of beauty](#) read 'I love',
Her dowry shall weigh equal with a [queen](#).
For [Anjou](#) and fair Touraine, Maine, Poitiers,
And all that we upon this side the sea –
[Except this city](#) now by us besieged –
490 [Find liable](#) to our crown and dignity,
Shall [gild her bridal bed](#) and make her rich
In titles, honours, and [promotions](#),
As she in beauty, [education](#), blood,

Holds hand with any princess of the world.

KING PHILIP

What sayst thou, boy? Look in the lady's face.

LEWIS THE DAUPHIN

I do, my lord. And in her eye I find

A wonder, or a wondrous miracle,

The shadow of myself formed in her eye;

Which, being but the shadow of your son,

500 Becomes a sun and makes your son a shadow.

I do protest I never loved myself

Till now infixèd I beheld myself

Drawn in the flattering table of her eye.

He whispers with Blanche

BASTARD (*aside*)

Drawn in the flattering table of her eye!

Hanged in the frowning wrinkle of her brow

And quartered in her heart! He doth espy

Himself love's traitor. This is pity now,

That, hanged and drawn and quartered, there should be

In such a love so vile a lout as he.

BLANCHE (*to Lewis*)

510 My uncle's will in this respect is mine.

If he see aught in you that makes him like,

That anything he sees which moves his liking,

I can with ease translate it to my will.

Or if you will, to speak more properly,

I will enforce it easily to my love.

Further I will not flatter you, my lord,

That all I see in you is worthy love,

Than this: that nothing do I see in you,

Though churlish thoughts themselves should be your
judge,

520 That I can find should merit any hate.

KING JOHN

What say these young ones? What say you, my niece?

BLANCHE

That she is bound in honour still to do

What you in wisdom still vouchsafe to say.

KING JOHN

Speak then, Prince Dauphin. Can you love this lady?

LEWIS THE DAUPHIN

Nay, ask me if I can refrain from love;

For I do love her most unfeignedly.

KING JOHN

Then do I give Volquessen, Touraine, Maine,
Poitiers, and Anjou, these five provinces,
With her to thee; and this addition more,

530 Full thirty thousand marks of English coin.

Philip of France, if thou be pleased withal,
Command thy son and daughter to join hands.

KING PHILIP

It likes us well. Young princes, close your hands.

AUSTRIA

And your lips too – for I am well assured
That I did so when I was first assured.

KING PHILIP

Now, citizens of Angiers, ope your gates;
Let in that amity which you have made.
For at Saint Mary's chapel presently
The rites of marriage shall be solemnized.

540 Is not the Lady Constance in this troop?

I know she is not, for this match made up
Her presence would have interrupted much.
Where is she and her son? Tell me, who knows.

LEWIS THE DAUPHIN

She is sad and passionate at your highness' tent.

KING PHILIP

And, by my faith, this league that we have made
Will give her sadness very little cure.
Brother of England, how may we content
This widow-lady? In her right we came,
Which we, God knows, have turned another way,
To our own vantage.

KING JOHN

550 We will heal up all,

For we'll create young Arthur Duke of Brittain
And Earl of Richmond; and this rich fair town
We make him lord of. Call the Lady Constance;
Some speedy messenger bid her repair
To our solemnity. I trust we shall,
If not fill up the measure of her will,
Yet in some measure satisfy her so
That we shall stop her exclamation.
Go we as well as haste will suffer us

560 To this unlooked-for, unprepared pomp.

BASTARD

Mad world! Mad kings! Mad composition!
John, to stop Arthur's title in the whole,
Hath willingly departed with a part;
And France, whose armour conscience buckled on,
Whom zeal and charity brought to the field
As God's own soldier, rounded in the ear
With that same purpose-changer, that sly devil,
That broker that still breaks the pate of faith,
That daily break-vow, he that wins of all,

- 570 Of kings, of beggars, old men, young men, maids –
Who, having no external thing to lose
But the word 'maid', cheats the poor maid of that –
That smooth-faced gentleman, tickling commodity;
Commodity, the bias of the world –
The world, who of itself is peisèd well,
Made to run even upon even ground,
Till this advantage, this vile-drawing bias,
This sway of motion, this commodity,
Makes it take head from all indifferency,
580 From all direction, purpose, course, intent –
And this same bias, this commodity,
This bawd, this broker, this all-changing word,
Clapped on the outward eye of fickle France,
Hath drawn him from his own determined aid,
From a resolved and honourable war,
To a most base and vile-concluded peace.
And why rail I on this commodity?

But for because he hath not wooed me yet;
Not that I have the power to clutch my hand

- 590 When his fair angels would salute my palm,
But for my hand, as unattempted yet,
Like a poor beggar raileth on the rich.
Well, whiles I am a beggar, I will rail
And say there is no sin but to be rich;
And being rich, my virtue then shall be
To say there is no vice but beggary.
Since kings break faith upon commodity,
Gain, be my lord – for I will worship thee!

III.1 *Enter Constance, Arthur, and Salisbury*

CONSTANCE

Gone to be married? Gone to swear a peace?
 False blood to false blood joined! Gone to be friends?
 Shall Lewis have Blanche, and Blanche those provinces?
 It is not so; thou hast misspoke, misheard.
 Be well advised, tell o'er thy tale again.
 It cannot be; thou dost but say 'tis so.
 I trust I may not trust thee, for thy word
 Is but the vain breath of a common man.
 Believe me, I do not believe thee, man;

10 I have a king's oath to the contrary.
 Thou shalt be punished for thus frightening me,
 For I am sick and capable of fears,
 Oppressed with wrongs, and therefore full of fears,
 A widow, husbandless, subject to fears,
 A woman, naturally born to fears;
 And, though thou now confess thou didst but jest,
 With my vexed spirits I cannot take a truce,
 But they will quake and tremble all this day.
 What dost thou mean by shaking of thy head?

20 Why dost thou look so sadly on my son?
 What means that hand upon that breast of thine?
 Why holds thine eye that lamentable rheum,
 Like a proud river peering o'er his bounds?
 Be these sad signs confirmers of thy words?
 Then speak again – not all thy former tale,
 But this one word, whether thy tale be true.

SALISBURY

As true as I believe you think them false
 That give you cause to prove my saying true.

CONSTANCE

O, if thou teach me to believe this sorrow,

30 Teach thou this sorrow how to make me die!
 And let belief and life encounter so
 As doth the fury of two desperate men
 Which in the very meeting fall and die.
 Lewis marry Blanche! O boy, then where art thou?
 France friend with England, what becomes of me?

Fellow, be gone! I cannot brook thy sight.
This news hath made thee a most ugly man.

SALISBURY

What other harm have I, good lady, done,
But spoke the harm that is by others done?

CONSTANCE

40 Which harm within itself so heinous is
As it makes harmful all that speak of it.

ARTHUR

I do beseech you, madam, be content.

CONSTANCE

If thou that biddest me be content wert grim,
Ugly and slanderous to thy mother's womb,
Full of unpleasing blots and sightless stains,
Lame, foolish, crookèd, swart, prodigious,
Patched with foul moles and eye-offending marks,
I would not care, I then would be content,
For then I should not love thee; no, nor thou

50 Become thy great birth, nor deserve a crown.
But thou art fair, and at thy birth, dear boy,
Nature and fortune joined to make thee great.
Of nature's gifts thou mayst with lilies boast
And with the half-blown rose. But fortune, O,
She is corrupted, changed, and won from thee;
She adulterates hourly with thine uncle John,
And with her golden hand hath plucked on France
To tread down fair respect of sovereignty,
And made his majesty the bawd to theirs.

60 France is a bawd to fortune and King John,
That strumpet fortune, that usurping John!
Tell me, thou fellow, is not France forsworn?
Envenom him with words, or get thee gone
And leave those woes alone which I alone
Am bound to underbear.

SALISBURY

Pardon me, madam,
I may not go without you to the Kings.

CONSTANCE

Thou mayst, thou shalt. I will not go with thee.
I will instruct my sorrows to be proud,
For grief is proud and makes his owner stoop.
She seats herself on the ground

70 To me and to the [state](#) of my great grief
Let kings assemble; for my grief's so great
That no [supporter](#) but the huge firm earth
Can hold it up. Here I and sorrows sit;
Here is my throne. Bid kings come bow to it.

*Exit Salisbury with Arthur,
leaving Constance seated*

*Enter King John, King Philip, Queen Eleanor, Lewis
the Dauphin, Blanche, the Bastard, Austria, and
attendants*

KING PHILIP

'Tis true, fair daughter; and this blessed day
Ever in France shall be [kept festival](#).

To solemnize this day the glorious sun
[Stays in his course](#) and [plays the alchemist](#),
Turning with splendour of his precious eye

80 The [meagre](#) cloddy earth to glittering gold.
[The yearly course that brings this day about](#)
Shall never see it but a [holiday](#).

CONSTANCE ([rising](#))

A wicked day, and not a holy day!
What hath this day deserved, what hath it done,
[That it in golden letters](#) should be set
Among the high tides in the calendar?
Nay, rather turn this day out of the week,
This day of shame, oppression, perjury.
Or, if it must [stand still](#), [let wives with child](#)

90 Pray that their burdens may not fall this day,
[Lest that their hopes prodigiously be crossed](#).
[But on this day](#) let seamen fear no [wrack](#);
[No bargains break that are not this day made](#);
[This day all things begun come to ill end](#),
Yea, faith itself to hollow falsehood change!

KING PHILIP

[By heaven](#), lady, you shall have no cause
To curse the fair proceedings of this day.
Have I not [pawned to you my majesty](#)?

CONSTANCE

You have beguiled me with a [counterfeit](#)

100 Resembling majesty, which, being [touched and tried](#),
Proves valueless. You are [forsworn](#), forsworn!
You came [in arms](#) to spill mine enemies' blood,

But now in arms you strengthen it with **yours**.
The grappling vigour and rough frown of **war**
Is cold in amity and painted peace,
And **our oppression** hath **made up** this league.
Arm, arm, you heavens, against these **perjured Kings!**
A widow cries; be husband to me, heavens.
Let not the hours of this ungodly day

- 110 Wear out the **day** in peace; but, ere **sunset**,
Set **armèd** discord 'twixt these perjured Kings.
Hear me! O, hear me!

AUSTRIA

Lady Constance, peace!

CONSTANCE

War! War! No peace! Peace is to me a war.
O **Limoges!** O Austria! Thou dost shame
That **bloody spoil**. Thou slave, thou wretch, thou
coward!

Thou little valiant, great in villainy!
Thou ever strong upon the stronger side!
Thou fortune's champion, that dost never fight
But when her **humorous ladyship** is by

- 120 To **teach thee safety!** Thou art perjured too,
And **sootheest up greatness**. What a fool art thou,
A **ramping** fool, to brag and stamp and **swear**
Upon my party! Thou cold-blooded slave!
Hast thou not spoke like thunder on my side,
Been sworn my soldier, bidding me depend
Upon thy stars, thy fortune, and thy strength,
And dost thou now **fall over** to my foes?
Thou wear a lion's hide! Doff it for shame,
And hang a **calf's-skin** on those **recreant** limbs.

AUSTRIA

- 130 O **that a man should speak those words to me!**

BASTARD

And hang a calf's-skin on those recreant limbs.

AUSTRIA

Thou **darest** not say so, villain, for thy life!

BASTARD

And hang a calf's-skin on those recreant limbs.

KING JOHN

We like not this; **thou dost forget thyself**.

Enter Cardinal Pandulph

KING PHILIP

Here comes the holy legate of the Pope.

CARDINAL PANDULPH

Hail, you [anointed deputies of heaven](#)!

To thee, King John, my holy errand is.

I Pandulph, of fair [Milan](#) Cardinal,

And from [Pope Innocent](#) the legate here,

140 Do in his name [religiously](#) demand

Why thou against the church, our holy mother,

So wilfully dost [spurn](#); and [force perforce](#)

[Keep Stephen Langton](#), chosen Archbishop

Of Canterbury, from that holy see.

This, in our foresaid Holy Father's name,

Pope Innocent, I do demand of thee.

KING JOHN

[What earthy name](#) to [interrogatories](#)

Can [task](#) the free breath of a sacred king?

Thou canst not, Cardinal, devise a name

150 So slight, unworthy, and ridiculous,

To [charge me to an answer](#), as the Pope.

Tell him [this tale](#), and from the mouth of England

Add thus much more: that no [Italian priest](#)

Shall [tithe or toll](#) in our dominions;

But as we, [under God](#), are [supreme head](#),

So, under Him, [that great supremacy](#)

Where we do reign we will alone uphold,

Without th'assistance of a mortal hand.

So tell the Pope, all reverence set apart

160 To him and his [usurped authority](#).

KING PHILIP

Brother of England, you blaspheme in this.

KING JOHN

Though you, and all the kings of Christendom,

Are [led so grossly](#) by this [meddling priest](#),

Dreading [the curse that money may buy out](#),

And by the [merit of vile gold](#), dross, dust,

[Purchase corrupted pardon](#) of a man,

[Who in that sale sells pardon from himself](#) –

Though you and all the rest, so grossly led,

This [juggling](#) witchcraft with [revenue cherish](#),

170 Yet I alone, alone do me oppose

Against the Pope, and count his friends my foes.

CARDINAL PANDULPH

Then, by the lawful power that I have,
Thou shalt stand cursed and excommunicate,
And blessèd shall he be that doth revolt
From his allegiance to an heretic;
And meritorious shall that hand be called,
Canonizèd and worshipped as a saint,
That takes away by any secret course
Thy hateful life.

CONSTANCE

O, lawful let it be

180 That I have room with Rome to curse awhile!
Good father Cardinal, cry thou 'Amen'
To my keen curses; for without my wrong
There is no tongue hath power to curse him right.

CARDINAL PANDULPH

There's law and warrant, lady, for my curse.

CONSTANCE

And for mine too; when law can do no right,
Let it be lawful that law bar no wrong.
Law cannot give my child his kingdom here,
For he that holds his kingdom holds the law.
Therefore, since law itself is perfect wrong,

190 How can the law forbid my tongue to curse?

CARDINAL PANDULPH

Philip of France, on peril of a curse,
Let go the hand of that arch-heretic,
And raise the power of France upon his head,
Unless he do submit himself to Rome.

QUEEN ELEANOR

Lookest thou pale, France? Do not let go thy hand.

CONSTANCE

Look to it, devil, lest that France repent,
And by disjoining hands, hell lose a soul.

AUSTRIA

King Philip, listen to the Cardinal.

BASTARD

And hang a calf's-skin on his recreant limbs.

AUSTRIA

200 Well, ruffian, I must pocket up these wrongs
Because –

BASTARD

Your breeches best may carry them.

KING JOHN

Philip, what sayst thou to the Cardinal?

CONSTANCE

What should he say, **but as the Cardinal?**

LEWIS THE DAUPHIN

Bethink you, father, for the **difference**

Is purchase of a heavy curse from Rome,

Or the light loss of England for a friend.

Forgo the easier.

BLANCHE

That's the curse of Rome.

CONSTANCE

O Lewis, stand fast! The devil tempts thee here

In likeness of a new, **untrimmèd** bride.

BLANCHE

210 The Lady Constance **speaks not from her faith,**

But from her need.

CONSTANCE

O, if thou grant my need,

Which only lives but by the death of faith,

That need must needs infer this principle,

That faith would live again by death of need.

O then, tread down my need, and faith mounts up;

Keep my need up, and faith is trodden down.

KING JOHN

The King is moved, and answers not to this.

CONSTANCE (*to King Philip*)

O, **be removed** from him, and answer well!

AUSTRIA

Do so, King Philip; hang no more in doubt.

BASTARD

220 Hang nothing but a calf's-skin, most sweet **lout.**

KING PHILIP

I am **perplexed**, and know not what to say.

CARDINAL PANDULPH

What canst thou say but will perplex thee more,

If thou stand excommunicate and cursed?

KING PHILIP

Good reverend father, **make my person yours,**

And tell me **how you would bestow yourself.**

This royal hand and mine are newly **knit,**

And the conjunction of our inward souls

Married in league, coupled and linked together

With all religious strength of sacred vows;

230 **The latest breath that gave the sound of words**

Was deep-sworn faith, peace, amity, true love

- Between our kingdoms and our royal selves;
And **even before** this truce, **but new before**,
No longer than we well could wash our hands
To **clap** this royal bargain up of peace,
Heaven knows, they were besmeared and **overstained**
With slaughter's **pencil**, where **revenge did paint**
The fearful **difference** of incensèd kings.
And shall these hands, so lately purged of blood,
240 So newly joined in love, so **strong in both**,
Unyoke this seizure and this kind **regreet**?
Play fast and loose with faith? So jest with heaven,
Make such unconstant children of ourselves,
As now again to snatch our palm from palm,
Unswear faith sworn, and on the **marriage-bed**
Of smiling peace to march a bloody host,
And make a riot on the gentle **brow**
Of true sincerity? O holy sir,
My reverend father, let it not be so!
250 Out of your grace, devise, ordain, impose
Some **gentle order**, and then we shall be blessed
To do your pleasure and continue friends.

CARDINAL PANDULPH

- All **form is formless, order orderless**,
Save what is **opposite** to England's love.
Therefore to arms! Be **champion of our church**,
Or let the church, our mother, breathe her curse,
A mother's curse, on her **revolting** son.
France, thou mayst hold a serpent by the tongue,
A **chafèd** lion by the **mortal** paw,
260 A fasting tiger safer by the tooth,
Than keep in peace that hand which thou dost hold.

KING PHILIP

I may disjoin my hand, but not my faith.

CARDINAL PANDULPH

- So makest thou faith an enemy to faith**,
And like a civil war settest **oath to oath**,
Thy tongue against thy tongue. O, let thy vow
First made to heaven, first be to heaven performed,
That is, to be the champion of our church.
What **since** thou sworest is sworn against thyself
And may not be performèd by thyself.
270 For **that which thou hast sworn** to do amiss

Is not amiss when it is truly done;
And being not done, where doing tends to ill,
The truth is then most done not doing it.
The better act of purposes mistook
Is to mistake again; though indirect,
Yet indirection thereby grows direct,
And falsehood falsehood cures, as fire cools fire
Within the scorched veins of one new burned.
It is religion that doth make vows kept,

280 But thou hast sworn against religion
By what thou swearest against the thing thou swearest,
And makest an oath the surety for thy truth
Against an oath! The truth thou art unsure
To swear, swears only not to be forsworn –
Else what a mockery should it be to swear!
But thou dost swear only to be forsworn,
And most forsworn to keep what thou dost swear.
Therefore thy later vows, against thy first,
Is in thyself rebellion to thyself;

290 And better conquest never canst thou make
Than arm thy constant and thy nobler parts
Against these giddy loose suggestions.
Upon which better part our prayers come in,
If thou vouchsafe them. But if not, then know
The peril of our curses light on thee
So heavy as thou shalt not shake them off,
But in despair die under their black weight.

AUSTRIA

Rebellion, flat rebellion!

BASTARD

Will't not be –

Will not a calf's-skin stop that mouth of thine?

LEWIS THE DAUPHIN

300 Father, to arms!

BLANCHE

Upon thy wedding-day?

Against the blood that thou hast married?
What, shall our feast be kept with slaughtered men?
Shall braying trumpets and loud churlish drums,
Clamours of hell, be measures to our pomp?
O husband, hear me! Ay, alack, how new
Is 'husband' in my mouth! Even for that name,

Which till this time my tongue did ne'er pronounce,
Upon my knee I beg, go not to arms
Against mine uncle.

CONSTANCE

O, upon my knee,
310 Made **hard with kneeling**, I do pray to thee,
Thou virtuous Dauphin, alter not the doom
Forethought by heaven.

BLANCHE

Now shall I see thy love! What motive may
Be stronger with thee than the name of wife?

CONSTANCE

That which upholdeth him that thee upholds,
His honour! O, thine honour, Lewis, thine honour!

LEWIS THE DAUPHIN

I muse your majesty doth seem so cold,
When such **profound respects** do pull you on!

CARDINAL PANDULPH

I will denounce a curse upon his head.

KING PHILIP

320 Thou shalt not need. England, I will **fall from thee**.

CONSTANCE

O **fair return of banished majesty**!

QUEEN ELEANOR

O foul revolt of French inconstancy!

KING JOHN

France, thou shalt rue this hour within this hour.

BASTARD

Old Time the clock-setter, that bald **sexton** Time,
Is it as he will? Well then, France shall rue.

BLANCHE

The sun's o'ercast with blood; fair day, adieu!

Which is the side that I must go withal?

I am with both; each army hath a hand,
And in their rage, I having hold of both,

330 They whirl asunder and **dismember me**.

Husband, I cannot pray that thou mayst win;
Uncle, I needs must pray that thou mayst lose.

Father, I may not wish the **fortune** thine;

Grandam, I will not wish thy wishes thrive.

Whoever wins, on that side shall I lose –

Assured loss, before the match be played!

LEWIS

Lady, with me, with me thy fortune lies.

BLANCHE

There where my fortune lives, there my life dies.

KING JOHN

Cousin, go draw our *puissance* together.

Exit the Bastard

340 France, I am burned up with inflaming wrath –

A rage whose heat hath this *condition*,

That nothing can allay, nothing but *blood*,

The blood, and dearest-valued blood, of France.

KING PHILIP

Thy rage shall burn thee up, and thou shalt turn

To ashes, ere our blood shall quench that fire.

Look to thyself, thou art in jeopardy!

KING JOHN

No more than he that threatens. *To arms let's hie!*

Exeunt

III.2 *Alarums, excursions.*

Enter the Bastard, with Austria's head

BASTARD

Now, by my life, *this day* grows wondrous hot.

Some airy devil hovers in the sky

And pours down mischief. Austria's head lie there,

While *Philip breathes*.

Enter King John, Arthur, and Hubert

KING JOHN

Hubert, keep this boy. Philip, *make up!*

My mother is assailed in our *tent*,

And ta'en, I fear.

BASTARD

My lord, I rescued her;

Her highness is in safety, fear you not.

But on, my liege! For very little pains

10 Will bring this labour to an happy end.

Exeunt

III.3 *Alarums, excursions, retreat. Enter King John,
Queen Eleanor, Arthur, the Bastard, Hubert, lords,
and soldiers*

KING JOHN (to Queen Eleanor)

So shall it be – *your grace shall stay behind,*

So strongly guarded. (*To Arthur*) Cousin, look not sad!
Thy grandam loves thee, and thy uncle will
As dear be to thee as thy father was.

ARTHUR

O, this will make my mother die with grief!

KING JOHN (*to the Bastard*)

Cousin, away for England! Haste before,
And ere our coming see thou shake the bags
Of hoarding abbots; imprisoned angels
Set at liberty. The fat ribs of peace

- 10 Must by the hungry now be fed upon.
Use our commission in his utmost force.

BASTARD

Bell, book, and candle shall not drive me back
When gold and silver beck me to come on.
I leave your highness. Grandam, I will pray –
If ever I remember to be holy –
For your fair safety. So I kiss your hand.

QUEEN ELEANOR

Farewell, gentle cousin.

KING JOHN

Coz, farewell.

Exit the Bastard

QUEEN ELEANOR

Come hither, little kinsman. Hark, a word.
She takes Arthur aside

KING JOHN

- Come hither, Hubert. O my gentle Hubert,
20 We owe thee much! Within this wall of flesh
There is a soul counts thee her creditor,
And with advantage means to pay thy love;
And, my good friend, thy voluntary oath
Lives in this bosom, dearly cherishèd.
Give me thy hand. I had a thing to say,
But I will fit it with some better tune.
By heaven, Hubert, I am almost ashamed
To say what good respect I have of thee.

HUBERT

I am much bounden to your majesty.

KING JOHN

- 30 Good friend, thou hast no cause to say so yet,
But thou shalt have; and creep time ne'er so slow,
Yet it shall come for me to do thee good.

I had a thing to say – but let it go.

The sun is in the heaven, and the proud day,
Attended with the pleasures of the world,
Is all too wanton and too full of gauds
To give me audience. If the midnight bell
Did with his iron tongue and brazen mouth
Sound on into the drowsy race of night;

40 If this same were a churchyard where we stand,
And thou possessèd with a thousand wrongs;
Or if that surly spirit, melancholy,
Had baked thy blood, and made it heavy, thick,
Which else runs tickling up and down the veins,
Making that idiot, laughter, keep men's eyes
And strain their cheeks to idle merriment,
A passion hateful to my purposes;
Or if that thou couldst see me without eyes,
Hear me without thine ears, and make reply

50 Without a tongue, using conceit alone,
Without eyes, ears, and harmful sound of words;
Then, in despite of brooded watchful day,
I would into thy bosom pour my thoughts.
But, ah, I will not. Yet I love thee well,
And, by my troth, I think thou lovest me well.

HUBERT

So well that what you bid me undertake,
Though that my death were adjunct to my act,
By heaven, I would do it.

KING JOHN

Do not I know thou wouldst?
Good Hubert! Hubert, Hubert, throw thine eye

60 On yon young boy. I'll tell thee what, my friend,
He is a very serpent in my way,
And wheresoe'er this foot of mine doth tread
He lies before me. Dost thou understand me?
Thou art his keeper.

HUBERT

And I'll keep him so

That he shall not offend your majesty.

KING JOHN

Death.

HUBERT

My lord.

KING JOHN

A grave.

HUBERT

He shall not live.

KING JOHN

Enough.

I could be merry now. Hubert, I love thee.

Well, I'll not say what I intend for thee.

Remember. Madam, fare you well.

70 I'll send those powers o'er to your majesty.

QUEEN ELEANOR

My blessing go with thee.

KING JOHN

For England, cousin, go.

Hubert shall be your man, attend on you

With all true duty. On toward Calais, ho!

Exeunt

III.4 Enter King Philip, Lewis the Dauphin, Cardinal
Pandulph, and attendants

KING PHILIP

So, by a roaring tempest on the flood,
A whole armado of convicted sail
Is scattered and disjointed from fellowship.

CARDINAL PANDULPH

Courage and comfort! All shall yet go well.

KING PHILIP

What can go well, when we have run so ill?
Are we not beaten? Is not Angiers lost?
Arthur ta'en prisoner? Divers dear friends slain?
And bloody England into England gone,
O'erbearing interruption, spite of France?

LEWIS THE DAUPHIN

- 10 What he hath won, that hath he fortified.
So hot a speed, with such advice disposed,
Such temperate order in so fierce a cause,
Doth want example. Who hath read or heard
Of any kindred action like to this?

KING PHILIP

Well could I bear that England had this praise,
So we could find some pattern of our shame.

Enter Constance

Look who comes here! A grave unto a soul,
Holding th'eternal spirit, against her will,
In the vile prison of afflicted breath.

- 20 I prithee, lady, go away with me.

CONSTANCE

Lo! Now – now see the issue of your peace!

KING PHILIP

Patience, good lady. Comfort, gentle Constance.

CONSTANCE

No, I defy all counsel, all redress,
But that which ends all counsel, true redress –
Death! Death, O amiable, lovely death!
Thou odoriferous stench! Sound rottenness!
Arise forth from the couch of lasting night,
Thou hate and terror to prosperity,
And I will kiss thy detestable bones,

30 And put my eyeballs in thy vaulty brows,
And ring these fingers with thy household worms,
And stop this gap of breath with fulsome dust,
And be a carrion monster like thyself.
Come, grin on me, and I will think thou smilest
And buss thee as thy wife. Misery's love,
O, come to me!

KING PHILIP

O fair affliction, peace!

CONSTANCE

No, no, I will not, having breath to cry!
O that my tongue were in the thunder's mouth!
Then with a passion would I shake the world,

40 And rouse from sleep that fell anatomy
Which cannot hear a lady's feeble voice,
Which scorns a modern invocation.

CARDINAL PANDULPH

Lady, you utter madness, and not sorrow.

CONSTANCE

Thou art not holy to belie me so!

I am not mad. This hair I tear is mine.

My name is Constance. I was Geoffrey's wife.

Young Arthur is my son, and he is lost!

I am not mad – I would to heaven I were,

For then 'tis like I should forget myself!

50 O, if I could, what grief should I forget!
Preach some philosophy to make me mad,
And thou shalt be canonized, Cardinal.
For, being not mad, but sensible of grief,
My reasonable part produces reason
How I may be delivered of these woes,
And teaches me to kill or hang myself.
If I were mad, I should forget my son,
Or madly think a babe of clouts were he.

I am not mad – too well, too well I feel

60 The different plague of each calamity.

KING PHILIP

Bind up those tresses! O, what love I note

In the fair multitude of those her hairs!

Where but by chance a silver drop hath fallen,

Even to that drop ten thousand wiry friends

Do glue themselves in sociable grief,

Like true, inseparable, faithful loves,
Sticking together in calamity.

CONSTANCE

To England, if you will.

KING PHILIP

Bind up your hairs.

CONSTANCE

Yes, **that I will**; and wherefore will I do it?

70 I tore them from their bonds, and cried aloud,
'O that these hands could so **redeem** my son
As they have given these hairs their liberty!
But now I **envy at** their liberty,
And will again commit them to their bonds,
Because my poor child is a prisoner.
And, father Cardinal, I have heard you say
That we shall see and know our friends in heaven.

If that be true, I shall see my boy again;
For since the birth of Cain, the first male child,

80 To him that **did but yesterday suspire**,
There **was not** such a **gracious** creature born.
But now will canker-sorrow eat **my bud**
And chase the **native** beauty from his cheek,
And he will look as hollow as a ghost,
As dim and meagre as an ague's fit,
And **so** he'll die; and, rising so again,
When I shall meet him in the court of heaven
I shall not **know** him. Therefore never, never
Must I behold my pretty Arthur more.

CARDINAL PANDULPH

90 **You hold too heinous a respect** of grief.

CONSTANCE

He talks to me that never had a son.

KING PHILIP

You are as **fond of** grief as of your child.

CONSTANCE

Grief fills the room up of my absent child,
Lies in his bed, walks up and down with me,
Puts on his pretty looks, repeats his words,
Remembers me of all his **gracious** parts,
Stuffs out his vacant garments with his form;
Then **have I reason to be fond of grief**?

Fare you well. **Had you** such a loss as I,

100 I could give better comfort than you do.

I will not keep this form upon my head
When there is such disorder in my wit.
O Lord! My boy, my Arthur, my fair son!
My life, my joy, my food, my all the world!
My widow-comfort, and my sorrows' cure!

Exit

KING PHILIP

I fear some outrage, and I'll follow her.

Exit

LEWIS THE DAUPHIN

There's nothing in this world can make me joy.

Life is as tedious as a twice-told tale,

Vexing the dull ear of a drowsy man,

110 And bitter shame hath spoiled the sweet world's taste,

That it yields naught but shame and bitterness.

CARDINAL PANDULPH

Before the curing of a strong disease,

Even in the instant of repair and health,

The fit is strongest. Evils that take leave,

On their departure most of all show evil.

What have you lost by losing of this day?

LEWIS THE DAUPHIN

All days of glory, joy, and happiness.

CARDINAL PANDULPH

If you had won it, certainly you had.

No, no. When fortune means to men most good

120 She looks upon them with a threatening eye.

'Tis strange to think how much King John hath lost

In this which he accounts so clearly won.

Are not you grieved that Arthur is his prisoner?

LEWIS THE DAUPHIN

As heartily as he is glad he hath him.

CARDINAL PANDULPH

Your mind is all as youthful as your blood.

Now hear me speak with a prophetic spirit;

For even the breath of what I mean to speak

Shall blow each dust, each straw, each little rub,

Out of the path which shall directly lead

130 Thy foot to England's throne. And therefore mark:

John hath seized Arthur, and it cannot be

That whiles warm life plays in that infant's veins

The misplaced John should entertain an hour,

One minute, nay, one quiet breath, of rest.

A sceptre snatched with an **unruly** hand
Must be **as boisterously** maintained as gained;
And **he that stands** upon a slippery place
Makes nice of no vile hold to stay him up.
That John may stand, then Arthur needs must fall.

140 **So be it** – for it cannot be but so.

LEWIS THE DAUPHIN

But what shall I gain by young Arthur's fall?

CARDINAL PANDULPH

You, in the right of Lady Blanche your wife,
May then make all the claim that Arthur did.

LEWIS THE DAUPHIN

And lose it, life and all, as Arthur did.

CARDINAL PANDULPH

How green you are and fresh in this old world!
John **lays you plots; the times conspire with you** –
For **he that steeps his safety** in true blood
Shall find but bloody safety and untrue.
This act, so evilly **borne**, shall **cool the hearts**

150 Of all his people, and freeze up their **zeal**,
That **none so small advantage** shall step forth
To **check his reign**, but they will cherish it.
No natural exhalation in the sky,
No scope of nature, no **distempered** day,
No common wind, no **customèd** event,
But they will **pluck away his natural cause**
And call them **meteors, prodigies and signs**,
Abortives, presages, and **tongues of heaven**,
Plainly denouncing vengeance upon John.

LEWIS THE DAUPHIN

160 Maybe he will not touch young Arthur's life,
But **hold himself safe in his prisonment.**

CARDINAL PANDULPH

O sir, when he shall hear of your approach,
If that young Arthur be not gone already,
Even at **that news** he dies; and then the hearts
Of all his people shall revolt from him,
And **kiss the lips of unacquainted change**,
And **pick strong matter** of revolt and wrath
Out of the bloody fingers' ends of John.
Methinks I see this **hurly** all on foot;

170 And, O, **what better matter breeds for you**

Than I have named! The bastard Faulconbridge
Is now in England ransacking the church,
Offending charity. If but a dozen French
Were there in arms, they would be as a **call**
To **train** ten thousand English to their side,
Or as a little snow, tumbled about,
Anon becomes a mountain. O noble Dauphin,
Go with me to the King. 'Tis wonderful
What may be wrought out of their discontent,
180 Now that their souls are **topfull of offence**.

For England, go! I will **whet on** the King.

LEWIS THE DAUPHIN

Strong reasons **makes strong actions!** Let us go.
If you say ay, the King will not say no.

Exeunt

*

IV.1 *Enter Hubert and **executioners***

HUBERT

Heat me these irons hot, and look thou stand
Within the **arras**. When I **strike my foot**
Upon the bosom of the ground, rush forth
And bind the boy which you shall find with me
Fast to the chair. Be heedful. Hence, and watch!

EXECUTIONER

I hope your warrant will bear out the deed.

HUBERT

Uncleanly scruples! Fear not you. Look to't!

The executioners withdraw

Young lad, come forth; **I have to say with** you.

Enter Arthur

ARTHUR

Good morrow, Hubert.

HUBERT

Good morrow, little prince.

ARTHUR

10 **As little prince**, having so great a title
To be more prince, as may be. You are sad.

HUBERT

Indeed, I have been merrier.

ARTHUR

Mercy on me!

Methinks nobody should be sad but I.
Yet I remember, when I was in France,
Young gentlemen would be as sad as night
Only for wantonness. By my christendom,
So I were out of prison and kept sheep,
I should be as merry as the day is long;
And so I would be here, but that I doubt

- 20 My uncle practises more harm to me.
He is afraid of me and I of him.
Is it my fault that I was Geoffrey's son?
No, indeed is't not; and I would to heaven
I were your son, so you would love me, Hubert.

HUBERT (*aside*)

If I talk to him, with his innocent prate
He will awake my mercy, which lies dead.
Therefore I will be sudden, and dispatch.

ARTHUR

Are you sick, Hubert? You look pale today.
In sooth, I would you were a little sick,

- 30 That I might sit all night and watch with you.
I warrant I love you more than you do me.

HUBERT (*aside*)

His words do take possession of my bosom.

He shows Arthur the warrant

Read here, young Arthur. (*Aside*) How now, foolish
rheum!

Turning despiteous torture out of door!

I must be brief, lest resolution drop
Out at mine eyes in tender womanish tears.
Can you not read it? Is it not fair writ?

ARTHUR

Too fairly, Hubert, for so foul effect.

Must you with hot irons burn out both mine eyes?

HUBERT

- 40 Young boy, I must.

ARTHUR

And will you?

HUBERT

And I will.

ARTHUR

Have you the heart? When your head did but ache,
I knit my handkercher about your brows –

The best I had, a princess wrought it me –
And I *did* never ask it you again;
And with my hand at midnight *held your head*,
And, like the *watchful minutes to the hour*,
Still and anon cheered up the heavy time,
Saying ‘What lack you?’, and ‘Where *lies your grief?*’,
Or ‘What *good love* may I perform for you?’.

50 Many a poor man’s son would have *lien still*
And ne’er have spoke a loving word to you;
But you *at your sick service* had a prince.
Nay, you may think my love was *crafty* love,
And call it cunning. Do, an if you will.
If heaven be pleased that you must use me ill,
Why then you must. Will you put out mine eyes –
These eyes that never did, nor never shall,
So much as frown on you?

HUBERT

I have sworn to do it,
And *with hot irons must I burn them out*.

ARTHUR

60 Ah, none but in this *iron age* would do it!
The iron of itself, though *heat* red-hot,
Approaching near these eyes, would drink my tears
And quench *his* fiery indignation
Even in the *matter* of mine innocence;
Nay, after that, *consume away* in rust,
But for containing fire to harm mine eye.
Are you more stubborn-hard than hammered iron?
An if an angel should have come to me
And told me Hubert should put out mine eyes,
70 I would not have believed him—no tongue but Hubert’s!
Hubert stamps his foot

HUBERT

Come forth!

The executioners come forward with ropes and irons
Do as I bid you do.

ARTHUR

O, save me, Hubert, save me! *My eyes are out*
Even with the fierce looks of these bloody men.

HUBERT

Give me the iron, I say, and bind him here.

ARTHUR

Alas, what need you be so **boisterous**-rough?
I will not struggle; I will stand stone-still.
For **heaven's** sake, Hubert, let me not be bound!
Nay, hear me, Hubert! Drive these men away,
And I will sit as quiet as a lamb.

- 80 I will not stir, nor **winch**, nor speak a word,
Nor look upon the iron angrily.
Thrust but these men away, and I'll forgive you,
Whatever torment you do put me to.

HUBERT

Go stand **within**. Let me alone with him.

EXECUTIONER

I am best pleased to be from such a deed.

Exeunt executioners

ARTHUR

Alas, I then have **chid away** my friend!
He hath a stern look, but a gentle heart.
Let him come back, that his compassion may
Give life to yours.

HUBERT

Come, boy, prepare yourself.

ARTHUR

- 90 Is there no remedy?

HUBERT

None, but to lose your eyes.

ARTHUR

O heaven, that there were but a **mote** in yours,
A grain, a **dust**, a gnat, a wandering hair,
Any annoyance in that precious sense.
Then **feeling what small things are boisterous there**,
Your vile intent must needs seem horrible.

HUBERT

Is this your promise? **Go to**, hold your tongue!

ARTHUR

Hubert, **the utterance** of a brace of tongues
Must needs want pleading for a pair of eyes.
Let me not hold my tongue. **Let me not, Hubert!**

- 100 Or, Hubert, if you will, cut out my tongue,
So I may keep mine eyes. O, spare mine eyes,
Though to no use but still to look on you!
Lo, by my **troth**, the instrument is cold
And **would not** harm me.

HUBERT

I can heat it, boy.

ARTHUR

No, *in good sooth; the fire is dead* with grief,

Being create for comfort, to be used

In undeserved extremes. See else yourself.

There is no malice in this burning coal;

The breath of heaven hath blown his spirit out,

110 And *strewed repentant ashes on his head*.

HUBERT

But *with my breath* I can revive it, boy.

ARTHUR

An if you do, you will but make it *blush*

And glow with shame of your proceedings, Hubert.

Nay, it perchance will *sparkle in* your eyes,

And, like a dog that is compelled to fight,

Snatch at his master that doth *tarre* him on.

All things that you *should* use to do me wrong

Deny their office. Only you do lack

That mercy which fierce fire and iron *extends* –

120 *Creatures of note for mercy-lacking uses*.

HUBERT

Well, *see to live*. I will not touch thine *eye*

For all the treasure that thine uncle *owes*;

Yet am I sworn, and I did purpose, boy,

With this same very iron to burn them out.

ARTHUR

O, now you look like Hubert. All this while

You were disguisèd.

HUBERT

Peace! No more. Adieu.

Your uncle must not know but you are dead.

I'll fill these *doggèd* spies with false reports;

And, pretty child, *sleep doubtless and secure*

130 That Hubert, for the wealth of all the world,

Will not offend thee.

ARTHUR

O heaven! I thank you, Hubert.

HUBERT

Silence! No more. Go *closely* in with me.

Much danger do I undergo for thee.

Exeunt

IV.2 *Enter King John, Pembroke, Salisbury, and other lords*

KING JOHN

Here once again we sit, once again crowned,
And looked upon, I hope, with cheerful eyes.

PEMBROKE

This 'once again', but that your highness pleased,
Was once superfluous. You were crowned before,
And that high royalty was ne'er plucked off,
The faiths of men ne'er stained with revolt;
Fresh expectation troubled not the land
With any longed-for change or better state.

SALISBURY

Therefore, to be possessed with double pomp,
10 To guard a title that was rich before,
To gild refinèd gold, to paint the lily,
To throw a perfume on the violet,
To smooth the ice, or add another hue
Unto the rainbow, or with taper-light
To seek the beauteous eye of heaven to garnish,
Is wasteful and ridiculous excess.

PEMBROKE

But that your royal pleasure must be done,
This act is as an ancient tale new told,
And in the last repeating troublesome,
20 Being urgèd at a time unseasonable.

SALISBURY

In this the antique and well noted face
Of plain old form is much disfigurèd;
And, like a shifted wind unto a sail,
It makes the course of thoughts to fetch about,
Startles and frights consideration,
Makes sound opinion sick and truth suspected,
For putting on so new a fashioned robe.

PEMBROKE

When workmen strive to do better than well,
They do confound their skill in covetousness;
30 And oftentimes excusing of a fault
Doth make the fault the worser by th'excuse,
As patches set upon a little breach
Discredit more in hiding of the fault
Than did the fault before it was so patched.

SALISBURY

To this effect, before you were new crowned,
We breathed our counsel. But it pleased your highness

To overbear it, and we are all well pleased,
Since **all and every part** of what we would
Doth make a stand at what your highness will.

KING JOHN

- 40 Some reasons of this double coronation
I have **possessed you with**, and think them strong;
And more, more strong, **when lesser is my fear**,
I shall **indue** you with. **Meantime but ask**
What you would have reformed that is not well,
And well shall you perceive how willingly
I will both hear and grant you your requests.

PEMBROKE

- Then I, as one that am **the tongue of these**
To sound the purposes of all their hearts,
Both for myself and them – but, chief of all,
50 Your safety, for the which myself and **them**
Bend their best studies – heartily request
Th'**enfranchisement** of Arthur, whose restraint
Doth **move the murmuring lips** of discontent
To break into **this dangerous argument**:
If what in rest you have in right you hold,
Why then your fears, which, as they say, attend
The steps of wrong, should move you to **mew up**
Your tender kinsman, and to choke his days
With barbarous ignorance, and deny his youth
60 The rich advantage of **good exercise**.
That **the time's enemies** may not have this
To **grace occasions**, **let it be our suit**,
That you have bid us ask, his liberty;
Which for our goods we do no further ask
Than whereupon our weal, on you depending,
Counts it your weal he have his liberty.

Enter Hubert

KING JOHN

Let it be so. I do commit his youth
To your direction. Hubert, what news with you?

He takes Hubert aside

PEMBROKE

- This is the man should do **the bloody deed**;
70 He showed his **warrant** to a friend of mine.
The image of a wicked heinous fault
Lives in his eye; that **close aspect** of his

Doth show the mood of a much troubled breast,
And I do fearfully believe 'tis done,
What we so feared he had a charge to do.

SALISBURY

The colour of the King doth come and go
Between his purpose and his conscience,
Like heralds 'twixt two dreadful battles set.
His passion is so ripe it needs must break.

PEMBROKE

80 And when it breaks, I fear will issue thence
The foul corruption of a sweet child's death.

KING JOHN (*coming forward*)

We cannot hold mortality's strong hand.
Good lords, although my will to give is living,
The suit which you demand is gone and dead.
He tells us Arthur is deceased tonight.

SALISBURY

Indeed we feared his sickness was past cure.

PEMBROKE

Indeed we heard how near his death he was,
Before the child himself felt he was sick.
This must be answered – either here or hence.

KING JOHN

90 Why do you bend such solemn brows on me?
Think you I bear the shears of destiny?
Have I commandment on the pulse of life?

SALISBURY

It is apparent foul play; and 'tis shame
That greatness should so grossly offer it.
So thrive it in your game! And so, farewell.

PEMBROKE

Stay yet, Lord Salisbury. I'll go with thee,
And find th'inheritance of this poor child,
His little kingdom of a forced grave.
That blood which owed the breadth of all this isle,

100 Three foot of it doth hold – bad world the while!
This must not be thus borne; this will break out
To all our sorrows, and ere long, I doubt.

Exeunt Pembroke, Salisbury, and the other lords

KING JOHN

They burn in indignation. I repent.
There is no sure foundation set on blood,
No certain life achieved by others' death.

Enter a Messenger

A fearful eye thou hast. Where is that blood
That I have seen inhabit in those cheeks?
So foul a sky clears not without a storm;
Pour down thy weather – how goes all in France?

MESSENGER

110 From France to England; never such a power
For any foreign preparation
Was levied in the body of a land.
The copy of your speed is learned by them;
For when you should be told they do prepare,
The tidings comes that they are all arrived.

KING JOHN

O, where hath our intelligence been drunk?
Where hath it slept? Where is my mother's care,
That such an army could be drawn in France
And she not hear of it?

MESSENGER

My liege, her ear

120 Is stopped with dust. The first of April died
Your noble mother; and, as I hear, my lord,
The Lady Constance in a frenzy died
Three days before. But this from rumour's tongue
I idly heard; if true or false I know not.

KING JOHN

Withhold thy speed, dreadful occasion!

O, make a league with me till I have pleased

My discontented peers. What! Mother dead?

How wildly then walks my estate in France!

Under whose conduct came those powers of France

130 That thou for truth givest out are landed here?

MESSENGER

Under the Dauphin.

Enter the Bastard and Peter of Pomfret

KING JOHN

Thou hast made me giddy

With these ill tidings. (To the Bastard) Now, what says
the world

To your proceedings? Do not seek to stuff

My head with more ill news, for it is full.

BASTARD

But if you be afeard to hear the worst,

Then let the worst unheard fall on your head.

KING JOHN

Bear with me, cousin, for I was **amazed**
Under the **tide**; but now I breathe again
Aloft the flood, and can give audience

140 To any tongue, speak it of what it will.

BASTARD

How I have **sped** among the clergymen
The sums I have collected shall express.
But as I **travelled** hither through the land,
I **find** the people strangely fantasied,
Possessed with rumours, full of idle dreams,
Not knowing what they fear, but full of fear.
And here's a **prophet** that I brought with me
From forth the streets of Pomfret, whom I found
With many hundreds treading on his heels;

150 To whom he sung, in rude harsh-sounding rhymes,
That, **ere the next Ascension Day at noon**,
Your highness should deliver up your crown.

KING JOHN

Thou idle dreamer, wherefore didst thou so?

PETER OF POMFRET

Foreknowing that the truth will fall out so.

KING JOHN

Hubert, away with him! Imprison him;
And on that day at noon whereon he says
I shall yield up my crown, let him be hanged.
Deliver him to **safety** and return,
For **I must use thee**.

Exit Hubert with Peter of Pomfret

O my **gentle** cousin,

160 **Hearest** thou the news abroad, who are arrived?

BASTARD

The French, my lord – **men's mouths are full of it**.
Besides, I met **Lord Bigot** and Lord Salisbury,
With **eyes as red as new-enkindled fire**,
And others more, going to seek the grave
Of Arthur, whom they say **is killed tonight**
On your suggestion.

KING JOHN

Gentle kinsman, go,
And **thrust thyself into their companies**.
I have a way to win their loves again;
Bring them before me.

BASTARD

I will seek them out.

KING JOHN

170 Nay, but make haste! *The better foot before!*

O, let me have no *subject enemies*,

When adverse foreigners affright my towns

With dreadful pomp of *stout* invasion.

Be Mercury, set feathers to thy heels,

And fly *like thought* from them to me again.

BASTARD

The spirit of the time shall teach me speed.

Exit

KING JOHN

Spoke like a *sprightful* noble gentleman!

(To the Messenger)

Go after him; for he perhaps shall need

Some messenger betwixt me and the peers;

180 And be thou he.

MESSENGER

With all my heart, my liege.

Exit

KING JOHN

My mother dead!

Enter Hubert

HUBERT

My lord, they say *five moons* were seen tonight –

Four fixèd, and the fifth did whirl about

The other four in *wondrous* motion.

KING JOHN

Five moons?

HUBERT

Old men and *beldams* in the streets

Do *prophecy upon it dangerously*.

Young *Arthur's death is common in their mouths*,

And when they talk of him they shake their heads

And whisper one another in the ear;

190 And he that speaks doth *gripe the hearer's wrist*,

Whilst he that hears makes *fearful action*,

With wrinkled brows, with nods, with rolling eyes.

I saw a smith stand with his hammer, *thus*,

The whilst his iron did on the anvil cool,

With open mouth *swallowing* a tailor's news;

Who, with his shears and measure in his hand,

Standing on slippers which his nimble haste
Had falsely thrust upon contrary feet,
Told of a many thousand warlike French
200 That were embattailèd and ranked in Kent.
Another lean unwashed artificer
Cuts off his tale and talks of Arthur's death.

KING JOHN

Why seekest thou to possess me with these fears?
Why urgest thou so oft young Arthur's death?
Thy hand hath murdered him; I had a mighty cause
To wish him dead, but thou hadst none to kill him.

HUBERT

No had, my lord! Why, did you not provoke me?

KING JOHN

It is the curse of kings to be attended
By slaves that take their humours for a warrant
210 To break within the bloody house of life,
And on the winking of authority
To understand a law, to know the meaning
Of dangerous majesty, when perchance it frowns
More upon humour than advised respect.

HUBERT

Here is your hand and seal for what I did.

KING JOHN

O, when the last account 'twixt heaven and earth
Is to be made, then shall this hand and seal
Witness against us to damnation!
How oft the sight of means to do ill deeds
220 Make deeds ill done! Hadst not thou been by,
A fellow by the hand of nature marked,
Quoted, and signed to do a deed of shame,
This murder had not come into my mind.
But, taking note of thy abhorred aspect,
Finding thee fit for bloody villainy,
Apt, liable to be employed in danger,
I faintly broke with thee of Arthur's death;
And thou, to be endeared to a king,
Made it no conscience to destroy a prince.

HUBERT

230 My lord –

KING JOHN

Hadst thou but shook thy head or made a pause
When I spake darkly what I purposed,

Or turned an eye of doubt upon my face,
As bid me tell my tale in express words,
Deep shame had struck me dumb, made me break off,
And those thy fears might have wrought fears in me.
But thou didst understand me by my signs
And didst in signs again parley with sin;
Yea, without stop, didst let thy heart consent,
240 And consequently thy rude hand to act
The deed which both our tongues held vile to name.
Out of my sight, and never see me more!
My nobles leave me, and my state is braved,
Even at my gates, with ranks of foreign powers;
Nay, in the body of this fleshly land,
This kingdom, this confine of blood and breath,
Hostility and civil tumult reigns
Between my conscience and my cousin's death.

HUBERT

Arm you against your other enemies;
250 I'll make a peace between your soul and you.
Young Arthur is alive. This hand of mine
Is yet a maiden and an innocent hand,
Not painted with the crimson spots of blood.
Within this bosom never entered yet
The dreadful motion of a murderous thought;
And you have slandered nature in my form,
Which, howsoever rude exteriorly,
Is yet the cover of a fairer mind
Than to be butcher of an innocent child.

KING JOHN

260 Doth Arthur live? O, haste thee to the peers!
Throw this report on their incensèd rage
And make them tame to their obedience.
Forgive the comment that my passion made
Upon thy feature; for my rage was blind,
And foul imaginary eyes of blood
Presented thee more hideous than thou art.
O, answer not, but to my closet bring
The angry lords with all expedient haste.
I conjure thee but slowly – run more fast!

Exeunt

IV.3 Enter Arthur *on the walls*

ARTHUR

The wall is high, and yet will I leap down.
Good ground, be pitiful and hurt me not!
There's few or none do know me; if they did,
This *ship-boy's semblance* hath disguised me quite.
I am afraid – and yet I'll venture it.
If I get down, and do not break my limbs,
I'll find a thousand *shifts* to get away.
As good to die and go as die and stay.

He leaps down

O me! My uncle's *spirit* is in these stones!

10 *Heaven take my soul, and England keep my bones!*

He dies

Enter Pembroke, Salisbury, and Bigot

SALISBURY

Lords, *I will meet him* at *Saint Edmundsbury*.
It is our safety, and we must embrace
This gentle offer of the perilous time.

PEMBROKE

Who brought that letter from the Cardinal?

SALISBURY

The *Count Melun*, a noble lord of France,
Whose private with me of the Dauphin's love
Is much more general than these lines import.

BIGOT

Tomorrow morning let us meet him then.

SALISBURY

Or rather then set forward; for 'twill be

20 *Two long days' journey*, lords, *or ere* we meet.

Enter the Bastard

BASTARD

Once more today well met, *distempered* lords!
The King by me requests your presence straight.

SALISBURY

The King hath dispossessed himself of us;
We will not *line* his *thin bestainèd cloak*
With our pure honours, nor *attend the foot*
That leaves the print of blood where'er it walks.
Return and tell him so! We know *the worst*.

BASTARD

Whate'er you think, *good words*, I think, were best.

SALISBURY

Our **griefs**, and not our manners, **reason** now.

BASTARD

30 But there is little reason in your grief.

Therefore **'twere reason you had** manners now.

PEMBROKE

Sir, sir, **impatience hath his privilege**.

BASTARD

'Tis true – to hurt his master, **no man else**.

SALISBURY

This is the prison.

He sees Arthur's body

What is he lies here?

PEMBROKE

O death, made proud with pure and princely beauty!

The earth had not a hole to hide this deed.

SALISBURY

Murder, as hating what himself hath done,

Doth lay it open to urge on revenge.

BIGOT

Or, when **he** doomed this beauty to a grave,

40 Found it **too precious-princely for a grave**.

SALISBURY

Sir Richard, what think you? **You have beheld**.

Or have you read, or heard, or could you think,

Or do you almost think, although you see,

That you do see? **Could thought, without this object,**

Form such another? This is the very top,

The height, **the crest**, or crest unto the crest,

Of murder's arms. This is the bloodiest shame,

The wildest savagery, the vilest stroke,

That ever **wall-eyed** wrath or staring rage

50 **Presented to the tears of soft remorse**.

PEMBROKE

All murders past **do stand excused in this**.

And this, so **sole** and so unmatchable,

Shall give a holiness, a purity,

To the yet-unbegotten sin of **times**,

And prove a deadly bloodshed but a jest,

Exemplified by this heinous spectacle.

BASTARD

It is a damnèd and a bloody work,

The **graceless** action of a **heavy** hand –

If that it be the work of any hand.

- 60 If that it be the work of any hand!
 We had a kind of *light* what would ensue.
 It is the shameful work of Hubert's hand,
 The *practice*, and the purpose, of the King –
From whose obedience I forbid my soul,
 Kneeling before this ruin of sweet life,
 And breathing to this breathless excellence
The incense of a vow, a holy vow,
 Never to taste the pleasures of the world,
 Never to be *infected with* delight,
- 70 Nor *conversant* with ease and idleness,
Till I have set a glory to this hand
 By giving it the worship of revenge.

PEMBROKE *and* BIGOT

Our souls religiously confirm thy words.

Enter Hubert

HUBERT

Lords, I am *hot with haste* in seeking you.
 Arthur doth live; the King hath sent for you.

SALISBURY

O, he is bold, and blushes not at death!
Avaunt, thou hateful villain! Get thee gone!

HUBERT

I am no villain.

SALISBURY

*Must I rob the law?**He draws his sword*

BASTARD

Your sword is bright, sir; put it up again.

SALISBURY

- 80 Not till I sheathe it in a murderer's skin.

HUBERT

Stand back, Lord Salisbury, stand back, I say!
 By heaven, I think my sword's as sharp as yours.
 I would not have you, lord, *forget yourself*,
 Nor *tempt* the danger of *my true defence*;
Lest I, by marking of your rage, forget
 Your worth, your greatness, and nobility.

BIGOT

Out, dunghill! *Darest* thou brave a nobleman?

HUBERT

Not for my life; but yet I dare defend

My innocent life against an emperor.

SALISBURY

Thou art a murderer.

HUBERT

90 Do not prove me so;

Yet I am none. Whose tongue soe'er speaks false,

Not truly speaks; who speaks not truly, lies.

PEMBROKE

Cut him to pieces!

BASTARD

Keep the peace, I say.

SALISBURY

Stand by, or I shall gall you, Faulconbridge.

BASTARD

Thou wert better gall the devil, Salisbury.

If thou but frown on me, or stir thy foot,

Or teach thy hasty spleen to do me shame,

I'll strike thee dead. Put up thy sword betime,

Or I'll so maul you and your toasting-iron

100 That you shall think the devil is come from hell.

BIGOT

What wilt thou do, renowned Faulconbridge?

Second a villain and a murderer?

HUBERT

Lord Bigot, I am none.

BIGOT

Who killed this prince?

HUBERT

'Tis not an hour since I left him well.

I honoured him, I loved him, and will weep

My date of life out for his sweet life's loss.

SALISBURY

Trust not those cunning waters of his eyes,

For villainy is not without such rheum,

And he, long traded in it, makes it seem

110 Like rivers of remorse and innocence.

Away with me, all you whose souls abhor

Th'uncleanly savours of a slaughter-house;

For I am stifled with this smell of sin.

BIGOT

Away toward Bury, to the Dauphin there!

PEMBROKE

There tell the King he may inquire us out.

Exeunt Pembroke, Salisbury, and Bigot

BASTARD

Here's a good world! Knew you of this fair work?

Beyond the infinite and boundless reach

Of mercy, if thou didst this deed of death,

Art thou damned, Hubert.

HUBERT

Do but hear me, sir –

BASTARD

120 Ha! I'll tell thee what.

Thou'rt damned as black – nay, nothing is so black;

Thou art more deep damned than Prince Lucifer;

There is not yet so ugly a fiend of hell

As thou shalt be, if thou didst kill this child.

HUBERT

Upon my soul –

BASTARD

If thou didst but consent

To this most cruel act, do but despair;

And if thou wantest a cord, the smallest thread

That ever spider twisted from her womb

Will serve to strangle thee; a rush will be a beam

130 To hang thee on; or wouldst thou drown thyself,

Put but a little water in a spoon

And it shall be as all the ocean,

Enough to stifle such a villain up.

I do suspect thee very grievously.

HUBERT

If I in act, consent, or sin of thought

Be guilty of the stealing that sweet breath

Which was embounded in this beauteous clay,

Let hell want pains enough to torture me.

I left him well.

BASTARD

Go, bear him in thine arms.

I am amazed, methinks, and lose my way

140 Among the thorns and dangers of this world.

How easy dost thou take all England up!

From forth this morsel of dead royalty

The life, the right and truth, of all this realm

Is fled to heaven; and England now is left

To tug and scramble and to part by th'teeth

The unowed interest of proud-swelling state.

Now for the bare-picked bone of majesty

Doth **dogged** war bristle his angry **crest**
150 And snarleth in the gentle eyes of peace;
Now **powers from home** and discontents at home
Meet in one line; and **vast confusion** waits,
As doth a raven on a sick-fallen beast,
The imminent decay of wrested pomp.
Now happy he whose cloak and ceinture can
Hold out this tempest. Bear away that child
And follow me with speed; **I'll to the King.**
A thousand businesses are **brief in hand,**
And heaven itself doth frown upon the land.

Exeunt

*

V.1 Enter King John, Cardinal Pandulph, and attendants

KING JOHN (*giving the crown to Cardinal Pandulph*)

Thus have **I yielded up** into your hand
The circle of my glory.

CARDINAL PANDULPH (*returning the crown*)

Take again

From this my hand, **as holding of** the Pope
Your sovereign greatness and authority.

KING JOHN

Now keep your **holy word**. Go meet the French,
And from **his holiness** use all your power
To stop their marches 'fore we are **inflamed**.
Our discontented **counties** do revolt;
Our people **quarrel with obedience**,

10 Swearing allegiance and the **love of soul**

To **stranger** blood, to foreign royalty.
This inundation of mistempered humour
Rests by you only to be **qualified**.

Then pause not, for the present **time's** so sick
That present **medicine** must be ministered,
Or **overthrow** incurable ensues.

CARDINAL PANDULPH

It was my breath that blew this tempest up,
Upon your stubborn usage of the Pope;
But since you are a gentle **convertite**,

20 My tongue shall hush again this storm of war

And make fair weather in your **blustering** land.
On this Ascension Day, remember well,
Upon your oath of service to the Pope,
Go I to make the French lay down their arms.

Exit

KING JOHN

Is this Ascension Day? **Did not the prophet**
Say that before Ascension Day at noon
My crown I should give off? Even so I have!
I did suppose it should be **on constraint**,
But, heaven be thanked, it is but voluntary.

Enter the Bastard

BASTARD

30 **All Kent hath yielded** – nothing there holds out
But Dover Castle; London hath received,
Like a kind host, the Dauphin and his **powers**;
Your nobles **will not hear you**, but are gone
To offer service to your enemy;
And **wild amazement hurries up and down**
The little number of your doubtful friends.

KING JOHN

Would not my lords return to me again
After they heard young Arthur was alive?

BASTARD

They found him dead and cast into the streets,
40 An empty **casket**, where the jewel of life
By some damned hand was robbed and ta'en away.

KING JOHN

That villain Hubert told me he did live.

BASTARD

So, on my soul, he did, for aught he knew.
But wherefore do you droop? Why look you sad?
Be great in act, as you have been in thought;
Let not the world see fear and sad **distrust**
Govern the motion of a kingly eye.
Be stirring as the time; be fire with fire;
Threaten the threatener, and outface **the brow**
50 Of bragging horror. So shall inferior eyes,
That **borrow their behaviours from** the great,
Grow great by your example and put on
The dauntless **spirit** of **resolution**.
Away, and glister like **the god of war**

When he intendeth to **become** the **field**.
Show boldness and **aspiring** confidence!
What, shall they seek **the lion in his den**,
And fright him there? And make him tremble there?
O, let it not be said! Forage, and run

- 60 To meet **displeasure** farther from the doors,
And grapple with him ere he come so nigh.

KING JOHN

The legate of the Pope hath been with me,
And I have made a **happy** peace with him;
And he hath promised to dismiss the powers
Led by the Dauphin.

BASTARD

O **inglorious** league!
Shall we, **upon the footing of our land**,
Send **fair-play orders** and make compromise,
Insinuation, parley, and base truce
To arms **invasive**? Shall a **beardless boy**,

- 70 A **cockered silken wanton**, **brave** our **fields**
And **flesh his spirit** in a warlike soil,
Mocking the air with colours **idly** spread,
And find no **check**? Let **us**, my liege, to arms!
Perchance the Cardinal cannot make **your peace**;
Or, if he do, let it at least be said
They saw we had a purpose of defence.

KING JOHN

Have thou the ordering of this present time.

BASTARD

Away, then, with good courage! Yet, I know,
Our party **may well meet** a **prouder** foe.

Exeunt

*V.2 Enter, in arms, Lewis the Dauphin, **Melun**,
Pembroke, Salisbury, Bigot, and soldiers*

LEWIS THE DAUPHIN

My Lord Melun, let this be copied out,
And keep it safe for our **remembrance**.
Return the **precedent** to these lords again,
That, having **our fair order** written down,
Both they and we, perusing o'er these notes,
May know **wherefore** we **took the sacrament**,

And keep our faiths firm and inviolable.

SALISBURY

Upon our sides it never shall be broken.
And, noble Dauphin, albeit **we swear**
10 A voluntary zeal and an unurged faith
To your proceedings, yet believe me, prince,
I am not glad **that such a sore** of time
Should seek a **plaster** by contemned revolt,
And heal the **inveterate canker** of one wound
By making many. O, it grieves my soul
That I must draw **this metal** from my side
To be a widow-maker! O, and **there**
Where honourable rescue and defence
Cries out upon the name of Salisbury!

20 **But such is the infection** of the time
That, for the health and **physic** of our right,
We cannot deal but with the very hand
Of stern injustice and confusèd wrong.
And **is't not pity**, O my grievèd friends,
That we, the sons and children of this isle,
Were born to see so sad an hour as this;
Wherein we step after a stranger, march
Upon her gentle bosom, and fill up
Her enemies' ranks – I must **withdraw and weep**

30 Upon the spot of this **enforcèd cause** –
To **grace** the gentry of a land remote,
And follow **unacquainted colours** here?
What, here? O nation, that thou couldst **remove!**
That **Neptune's arms, who clippeth thee about,**
Would **bear thee from the knowledge of thyself**
And **grapple** thee unto a pagan shore,
Where these **two Christian armies** might combine
The blood of malice in a vein of league,
And not to spend **it so unneighbourly!**

LEWIS THE DAUPHIN

40 **A noble temper** dost thou show in this,
And **great affections** wrestling in thy bosom
Doth make an earthquake of nobility.
O, what a noble combat **hast thou fought**
Between compulsion and a brave respect!
Let me wipe off this **honourable dew**

That silverly doth [progress](#) on thy cheeks.
My heart hath melted at a lady's tears,
[Being an ordinary inundation](#),
But this effusion of such manly drops,

- 50 This shower, [blown up by tempest of the soul](#),
Startles mine eyes, and makes me more [amazed](#)
Than had I seen the vaulty top of heaven
Figured quite o'er with burning [meteors](#).
Lift up thy brow, renownèd Salisbury,
And with a great heart heave away this storm.

[Commend](#) these waters to those baby eyes
That never saw [the giant world](#) enraged,
[Nor met with fortune other than at feasts](#),
[Full warm of blood](#), of mirth, of gossiping.

- 60 Come, come; for [thou shalt thrust](#) thy hand as deep
Into the purse of rich prosperity
As Lewis himself. So, nobles, shall you all,
That [knit your sinews to the strength of mine](#).

A trumpet sounds

And even there, methinks, [an angel spake](#).

Enter Cardinal Pandulph

Look where the holy legate comes apace,
To give us [warrant from the hand of heaven](#),
And on our actions [set](#) the name of right
With holy breath.

CARDINAL PANDULPH

Hail, noble prince of France!

[The next](#) is this: King John hath reconciled

- 70 Himself to Rome; his spirit [is come in](#)
That so [stood out against](#) the holy church,
The great metropolis and see of Rome.
Therefore thy [threatening colours](#) now wind up,
And tame the savage spirit of wild war,
That, like a lion [fostered up at hand](#),
It may lie gently at the foot of peace
And be no further harmful than in show.

LEWIS THE DAUPHIN

Your grace [shall](#) pardon me, I will not back.
I am too high-born [to be propertied](#),

- 80 To be a [secondary at control](#),
Or [useful](#) servingman and instrument

To any sovereign state throughout the world.
Your breath first kindled the dead coal of wars
Between this chastised kingdom and myself,
And brought in matter that should feed this fire;
And now 'tis far too huge to be blown out
With that same weak wind which enkindled it.
You taught me how to know the face of right,
Acquainted me with interest to this land,

90 Yea, thrust this enterprise into my heart;
And come ye now to tell me John hath made
His peace with Rome? What is that peace to me?
I, by the honour of my marriage-bed,
After young Arthur, claim this land for mine;
And now it is half conquered must I back
Because that John hath made his peace with Rome?
Am I Rome's slave? What penny hath Rome borne,
What men provided, what munition sent,
To underprop this action? Is't not I

100 That undergo this charge? Who else but I,
And such as to my claim are liable,
Sweat in this business and maintain this war?
Have I not heard these islanders shout out
'Vive le roi!' as I have banked their towns?
Have I not here the best cards for the game
To win this easy match played for a crown?
And shall I now give o'er the yielded set?
No! No, on my soul, it never shall be said!

CARDINAL PANDULPH

You look but on the outside of this work.

LEWIS THE DAUPHIN

110 Outside or inside, I will not return
Till my attempt so much be glorified
As to my ample hope was promised
Before I drew this gallant head of war,
And culled these fiery spirits from the world
To outlook conquest and to win renown
Even in the jaws of danger and of death.

A trumpet sounds

What lusty trumpet thus doth summon us?

Enter the Bastard

BASTARD

According to the fair play of the world,

Let me have audience; I am sent to speak.

- 120 My holy lord of Milan, from the King
I come, to learn how you have dealt for him;
And, as you answer, I do know the scope
And warrant limited unto my tongue.

CARDINAL PANDULPH

The Dauphin is too wilful-opposite,
And will not temporize with my entreaties.
He flatly says he'll not lay down his arms.

BASTARD

By all the blood that ever fury breathed,
The youth says well! Now hear our English King,
For thus his royalty doth speak in me:

- 130 He is prepared, and reason too he should.
This apish and unmannerly approach,
This harnessed masque and unadvised revel,
This unhaired sauciness and boyish troops,
The King doth smile at; and is well prepared
To whip this dwarfish war, this pygmy arms,
From out the circle of his territories.
That hand which had the strength, even at your door,
To cudgel you and make you take the hatch,
To dive like buckets in concealed wells,
- 140 To crouch in litter of your stable planks,
To lie like pawns locked up in chests and trunks,
To hug with swine, to seek sweet safety out
In vaults and prisons, and to thrill and shake
Even at the crying of your nation's crow,
Thinking this voice an armed Englishman –
Shall that victorious hand be feeble here
That in your chambers gave you chastisement?
No! Know the gallant monarch is in arms
And like an eagle o'er his eyrie towers
- 150 To souse annoyance that comes near his nest.
And you degenerate, you ingrate revolts,
You bloody Neroes, ripping up the womb
Of your dear mother England, blush for shame!
For your own ladies and pale-visaged maids,
Like Amazons, come tripping after drums,
Their thimbles into armed gauntlets change,
Their needles to lances, and their gentle hearts

To fierce and bloody inclination.

LEWIS THE DAUPHIN

There end thy **brave**, and **turn thy face** in peace.

160 We grant thou canst outscold us. Fare thee well!

We hold our time too precious to be spent

With such a **brabblor**.

CARDINAL PANDULPH

Give me leave to speak.

BASTARD

No, I will speak.

LEWIS THE DAUPHIN

We will **attend to** neither.

Strike up the drums, and **let the tongue of war**

Plead for our interest and our being here.

BASTARD

Indeed, your drums, being beaten, will cry out –

And so shall you, being beaten. **Do but start**

An echo with the clamour of thy drum,

And even at hand a drum is ready braced

170 That shall **reverberate** all as loud as thine.

Sound but another, and another shall,

As loud as thine, **rattle the welkin's ear**

And mock the deep-mouthed thunder. For at hand –

Not trusting to this **halting** legate here,

Whom he hath used rather for sport than need –

Is warlike John; and **in his forehead sits**

A bare-ribbed death, whose **office** is this day

To feast upon whole thousands of the French.

LEWIS THE DAUPHIN

Strike up our drums to **find this danger out**.

BASTARD

180 And thou shalt find it, Dauphin, do not doubt.

Exeunt

V.3 *Alarums. Enter King John and Hubert*

KING JOHN

How goes the day with us? O, tell me, Hubert.

HUBERT

Badly, I fear. How fares your majesty?

KING JOHN

This **fever** that hath **troubled me so long**

Lies heavy on me. O, **my heart is sick!**

Enter a Messenger

MESSENGER

My lord, your valiant kinsman, Faulconbridge,
Desires your majesty to leave the field
And send him word by me which way you go.

KING JOHN

Tell him, toward Swinstead, to the abbey there.

MESSENGER

Be of good comfort; for the great supply

- 10 That was expected by the Dauphin here
Are wracked three nights ago on Goodwin Sands.
This news was brought to Richard but even now.
The French fight coldly, and retire themselves.

KING JOHN

Ay me! This tyrant fever burns me up,
And will not let me welcome this good news.
Set on toward Swinstead. To my litter straight;
Weakness possesseth me, and I am faint.

Exeunt

V.4 Enter Salisbury, Pembroke, and Bigot

SALISBURY

I did not think the King so stored with friends.

PEMBROKE

Up once again! Put spirit in the French;
If they miscarry, we miscarry too.

SALISBURY

That misbegotten devil, Faulconbridge,
In spite of spite, alone upholds the day.

PEMBROKE

They say King John, sore sick, hath left the field.

Enter Melun, wounded

MELUN

Lead me to the revolts of England here.

SALISBURY

When we were happy we had other names.

PEMBROKE

It is the Count Melun.

SALISBURY

Wounded to death.

MELUN

- 10 Fly, noble English, you are bought and sold.
Unthread the rude eye of rebellion,
And welcome home again discarded faith.

Seek out King John and fall before his feet;
For if the French **be lords of this loud day**,
He means to recompense the pains you take
By cutting off your heads. Thus hath he sworn,
And I with him, and many more with me,
Upon the altar at Saint Edmundsbury;
Even on that altar where we swore to you

20 Dear amity and everlasting love.

SALISBURY

May this be possible? May this be true?

MELUN

Have I not hideous death within my view,
Retaining but a **quantity** of life,
Which bleeds away, **even as a form of wax**
Resolveth from his figure 'gainst the fire?
What in the world should make me now deceive,
Since I must **lose the use of all deceit**?
Why should I then be false, since it is true
That I must die here, and live **hence** by truth?

30 I say again, if Lewis do win the day,
He is forsworn if e'er those eyes of yours
Behold another daybreak in the east.
But even this night, whose black **contagious breath**
Already **smokes** about the **burning crest**
Of the old, feeble, and day-wearied sun,
Even this ill night, your **breathing** shall expire,
Paying the **fine of rated treachery**
Even with a **treacherous fine of all your lives**,
If Lewis by your assistance win the day.

40 **Commend me to one Hubert**, with your King.
The love of him, and this respect besides,
For that my grandsire was an Englishman,
Awakes my conscience to confess all this.
In lieu whereof, I pray you bear me hence
From forth the noise and **rumour** of the field,
Where I may think the remnant of my thoughts
In peace, and **part** this body and my soul
With contemplation and devout desires.

SALISBURY

We do believe thee; and **beshrew my soul**

50 But I do love the favour and the form
Of this most fair occasion, by the which

We will **unread** the steps of **damned flight**,
And like a bated and retired flood,
Leaving our **rankness** and **irregular** course,
Stoop low within those bounds we have o'erlooked,
And calmly run on in obedience
Even **to our ocean, to our great King John**.
My arm shall give thee help to bear thee hence;
For I do see the cruel pangs of death
60 **Right** in thine eye. Away, my friends! **New flight**,
And happy newness, that intends old right!
Exeunt, giving assistance to Melun

V.5 *Enter Lewis the Dauphin and his train*

LEWIS THE DAUPHIN

The sun of heaven, methought, was loath to set,
But stayed and made the western **welkin blush**,
When English **measured** backward their own ground
In **faint retire!** O, **bravely came we off**,
When with a volley of our **needless shot**,
After such bloody toil, we bid good night,
And wound our **tottering** colours **clearly** up,
Last in the field, and almost lords of it.

Enter a Messenger

MESSENGER

Where is my prince, the Dauphin?

LEWIS THE DAUPHIN

Here. What news?

MESSENGER

10 The Count Melun is slain. The English lords
By his persuasion **are again fallen off**,
And your supply, which you have wished so long,
Are cast away and sunk on Goodwin Sands.

LEWIS THE DAUPHIN

Ah, foul, **shrewd** news! **Beshrew** thy very heart!
I did not think to be so sad tonight
As this hath made me. Who was he that said
King John did fly **an hour or two before**
The **stumbling night** did part our weary powers?

MESSENGER

Whoever spoke it, it is true, my lord.

LEWIS THE DAUPHIN

20 Well, **keep good quarter** and good care tonight!

The day shall not be up so soon as I
To try the *fair adventure* of tomorrow.

Exeunt

*V.6 Enter the Bastard and Hubert, **severally***

BASTARD

Who's there? Speak, ho! Speak quickly, or I shoot.

HUBERT

A friend. What art thou?

BASTARD

Of the part of England.

HUBERT

Whither dost thou go?

BASTARD

What's that to thee?

HUBERT

Why may not I demand

Of thine affairs as well as thou of mine?

BASTARD

Hubert, I think.

HUBERT

Thou hast a perfect thought.

I will *upon all hazards* well believe

Thou art my friend, that knowest my *tongue* so well.

Who art thou?

BASTARD

Who thou wilt; and if thou please,

10 Thou mayst befriend me so much as to think

I come one way of the Plantagenets.

HUBERT

Unkind remembrance! *Thou* and *endless night*

Have *done me shame*. Brave soldier, pardon me

That any accent breaking from thy tongue

Should 'scape the true acquaintance of mine ear.

BASTARD

Come, come! *Sans compliment*, what news abroad?

HUBERT

Why, here walk I in the black brow of night

To find you out.

BASTARD

Brief, then; and what's the news?

HUBERT

O my sweet sir, news fitting to the night –

20 Black, fearful, comfortless, and horrible.

BASTARD

Show me the very wound of this ill news;

I am no woman, I'll not swound at it.

HUBERT

The King, I fear, is poisoned by a monk;

I left him almost speechless, and broke out

To acquaint you with this evil, that you might

The better arm you to the sudden time

Than if you had at leisure known of this.

BASTARD

How did he take it? Who did taste to him?

HUBERT

A monk, I tell you, a resolvèd villain,

30 Whose bowels suddenly burst out. The King

Yet speaks, and peradventure may recover.

BASTARD

Who didst thou leave to tend his majesty?

HUBERT

Why, know you not? The lords are all come back,

And brought Prince Henry in their company,

At whose request the King hath pardoned them,

And they are all about his majesty.

BASTARD

Withhold thine indignation, mighty heaven,

And tempt us not to bear above our power!

I'll tell thee, Hubert, half my power this night,

40 Passing these flats, are taken by the tide –

These Lincoln Washes have devourèd them;

Myself, well mounted, hardly have escaped.

Away before! Conduct me to the King;

I doubt he will be dead or ere I come.

Exeunt

V.7 Enter Prince Henry, Salisbury, and Bigot

PRINCE HENRY

It is too late. The life of all his blood

Is touched corruptibly, and his pure brain,

Which some suppose the soul's frail dwelling-house,

Doth by the idle comments that it makes

Foretell the ending of mortality.

Enter Pembroke

PEMBROKE

His highness yet doth speak, and holds belief
That, being brought into the open air,
It would allay the burning quality
Of that fell poison which assaileth him.

PRINCE HENRY

10 Let him be brought into the orchard here.

Exit Bigot

Doth he still rage?

PEMBROKE

He is more patient

Than when you left him. Even now he sung.

PRINCE HENRY

O vanity of sickness! Fierce extremes

In their continuance will not feel themselves.

Death, having preyed upon the outward parts,

Leaves them invincible, and his siege is now

Against the mind, the which he pricks and wounds

With many legions of strange fantasies,

Which, in their throng and press to that last hold,

20 Confound themselves. 'Tis strange that death should
sing.

I am the cygnet to this pale faint swan

Who chants a doleful hymn to his own death,

And from the organ-pipe of frailty sings

His soul and body to their lasting rest.

SALISBURY

Be of good comfort, prince; for you are born

To set a form upon that indigest

Which he hath left so shapeless and so rude.

King John is brought in by Bigot and other attendants

KING JOHN

Ay, marry, now my soul hath elbow-room;

It would not out at windows nor at doors.

30 There is so hot a summer in my bosom
That all my bowels crumble up to dust.
I am a scribbled form, drawn with a pen
Upon a parchment, and against this fire
Do I shrink up.

PRINCE HENRY

How fares your majesty?

KING JOHN

Poisoned – ill fare! Dead, forsook, cast off;

And none of you will bid the winter come

To thrust his icy fingers in my *maw*,
Nor let my kingdom's rivers take their course
Through my burned bosom, nor entreat the north
40 To make his bleak winds kiss my parchèd lips
And comfort me with cold. I do not ask you much –
I beg *cold comfort*; and you are so *strait*
And so ingrateful you deny me that.

PRINCE HENRY

O that there were some *virtue* in my tears
That might relieve you!

KING JOHN

The salt in them is hot.
Within me is a hell, and there the poison
Is as a fiend confined to tyrannize
On *unretrievable, condemnèd blood*.
Enter the Bastard

BASTARD

O, I am *scalded with my violent motion*
50 And spleen of speed to see your majesty!

KING JOHN

O cousin, thou art come to *set mine eye*!
The *tackle* of my heart is cracked and *burnt*,
And all the *shrouds* wherewith my life should sail
Are turnèd to one thread, one little hair;
My heart hath one poor *string* to stay it by,
Which holds but till thy news be utterèd,
And then all this thou seest is but a clod
And *module* of *confounded* royalty.

BASTARD

The Dauphin is preparing hitherward,
60 Where *God He knows how we shall answer him*!
For *in a night the best part of my power*,
As I *upon advantage did remove*,
Were in the Washes all unwarily
Devourèd by the *unexpected flood*.

King John dies

SALISBURY

You breathe these dead news in as dead an ear.
My liege! My lord! But now a king, now thus!

PRINCE HENRY

Even so must I run on, and even so stop.
What surety of the world, what hope, what *stay*,
When this was now a king, and now is clay?

BASTARD

- 70 Art thou gone so? I do but stay behind
To [do the office for thee of revenge](#),
And then [my soul shall wait on thee to heaven](#),
As it on earth hath been thy servant [still](#).
Now, now, [you stars that move in your right spheres](#),
Where be your powers? [Show now your mended faiths](#),
And instantly return with me again
To push [destruction and perpetual shame](#)
Out of the weak door of our fainting land.
Straight let us seek, or straight we shall be sought;
- 80 The Dauphin rages at our very heels.

SALISBURY

[It seems you know not](#), then, so much as we.
The Cardinal Pandulph is within at rest,
Who half an hour since came from the Dauphin,
And brings from him such [offers of our peace](#)
As we with honour and [respect](#) may take,
With purpose presently to leave this war.

BASTARD

He will the rather do it when he sees
Ourselves [well-sinewèd to our defence](#).

SALISBURY

Nay, 'tis in a manner done already;

- 90 For many [carriages](#) he hath dispatched
To the sea-side, and [put his cause and quarrel](#)
To the disposing of the Cardinal;
With whom yourself, myself, and other lords,
[If you think meet](#), this afternoon will [post](#)
To consummate this business happily.

BASTARD

Let it be so. And you, my noble prince,
With other [princes](#) that may best be spared,
Shall [wait upon your father's funeral](#).

PRINCE HENRY

[At Worcester](#) must his body be interred,
For so he willed it.

BASTARD

- 100 Thither shall it then.
And [happily](#) may your sweet self put on
The [lineal state](#) and glory of the land!
To whom, with all submission, on my knee,
I do bequeath my faithful services

And true subjection everlastingly.

SALISBURY

And the like tender of our love we make,
To **rest without a spot** for evermore.

PRINCE HENRY

I have a kind soul that would give thanks,
And knows not how to do it but with tears.

BASTARD

110 **O, let us pay the time** but needful woe,
Since it hath been beforehand with our griefs.
This England never did, nor never shall,
Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror
But when it first did help to wound itself.
Now these her princes are **come home again,**
Come the **three corners** of the world in arms
And we shall **shock them!** Naught shall make us rue
If England to itself do rest but true!

Exeunt

An Account of the Text

The only authoritative text of *King John* is that published in 1623 in the first Folio edition of Shakespeare's plays (hereafter referred to as F). The play appears there as the first of the histories, with the title *The Life and Death of King John*. It is impossible to know whether the text underwent any revision in the interval of nearly thirty years between its composition and its publication. Two possible indications of revision have been suggested. At III.3.23 King John refers to Hubert's 'voluntary oath' of loyalty to him. In the text as we have it there has been no previous reference to this oath. The casual way it is mentioned here, however, seems to suggest that we are expected to know about it. A lost scene in which we see the oath being taken has thus been thought possible. But casual references to events not depicted onstage are a fairly frequent part of Shakespeare's technique in establishing substance and context for a character or an event. The 'voluntary oath' therefore seems to provide inadequate grounds on which to argue that the text has been revised. A second point possibly suggestive of textual revision is at III.4.68. Here Constance's 'To England, if you will' seems very like a reply to King Philip's 'I prithee, lady, go away with me' at III.4.20, with the intervening lines interpolated. It is possible, however, that the long-delayed answer is an indication of Constance's distracted state of mind. Even if the lines are an addition, they might well have been inserted during the first stages of composition, as Shakespeare became interested in the portrayal of Constance's grief. There is, then, no conclusive evidence to show that the 1623 F text differs from that first performed in the 1590s, though certainty either way is impossible.

The F text seems to have been set up from an authorial manuscript. Its stage directions are, on the whole, rather sparse. None of them clearly suggests that the copy used by the printer had been prepared for use in the theatre, and only '*Iohn brought in*' (V.7.27) seems to have a particularly theatrical ring to it. At II.1.83 the F stage direction names Pembroke in the general entry. He does not speak in the scene, and such a false start seems to indicate a manuscript which had not

undergone the tidying process which would be necessary before performance. Similarly, some of F's directions indicate a precise setting which would be irrelevant to the conditions of the Elizabethan stage: '*Enter before Angiers*' (II.1.0); '*Enter a Citizen vpon the walles*' (II.1.200); '*Enter Arthur on the walles*' (IV.3.0). It seems likely that such directions reveal the author's thoughts about a scene's location during the process of composition. Stage directions which follow rather than precede the actions they refer to also seem unlikely to originate in a text fully prepared for theatrical performance. At I.1.49, for example, the direction for the entry of the Faulconbridges comes after John has asked them '*What men are you?*'; at I.1.220 the Bastard addresses a line and a half to his mother before the F direction for her entry; and at II.1.76 Chatillon hears '*churlish drums*' two lines before the F direction '*Drum beats*'. (Such irregularities are less numerous in the last two acts, and it may be that before printing these there was some correction to the manuscript from a theatrical prompt copy.)

Inconsistencies in speech-prefixes also seem to indicate that the F text was set from authorial manuscript. Queen Eleanor appears variously as '*Elea.*', '*Queen*', '*Qu. Mo.*', '*Old Qu.*', etc. Faulconbridge is '*Philip*' until he has accepted his royal parentage, but thereafter nearly always '*Bast*'. The most difficult problem of speech-prefixes, however, concerns King Philip of France. He appears as '*King*' until John's entry in II.1 and thereafter as '*France*' or '*Fra.*'. The 1954 Arden editor, E. A. J. Honigmann, suggests (pp. xxxiv v.) that this alteration may be a printing-house attempt to avoid possible confusion between the two Kings (John and Philip) now onstage; a miscorrection (caused by simple misreading) of the manuscript would explain the false ascription of the speech beginning at II.1.368 to '*Fra.*', where the lines are clearly to be spoken by the spokesman for Angiers. Professor Honigmann also tries to explain another confusion on the basis of such printing-house interference. At II.1.1, 18 and 150, speeches probably (and in one instance certainly) intended for the French King (that is, Philip) are given in F to '*Lewis*' or '*Lew.*' (that is, the Dazuphin). In spite of the ingenious redistribution of lines (collated in list 2 below) which Professor Honigmann bases on this hypothesis, it still seems more likely that Shakespeare did in fact confuse the Christian names of the French King and his son in these early stages of their parts in the play, automatically (and perhaps understandably) giving the name Lewis to the King of France. That such a confusion occurred is made almost certain by II.1.149, which reads in F: '*King Lewis, determine what we shall doe strait*'. Professor Honigmann argues that the first

word here is in fact F's misinterpretation of the manuscript's speech-prefix which gave the line to the *King* of France; thus he takes the line from Austria and gives it to Philip who addresses his son: 'Lewis, determine what we shall do straight'. But since 'Lewis' is monosyllabic in *King John*, an unsatisfactory nine-syllable line results. The regular ten syllables of the F line must reflect Shakespeare's temporary confusion of the details of his historical material. Such confusion is akin to the instances of apparent failure to differentiate between Richard Coeur-de-lion and his brother Geoffrey ([discussed in the Commentary to II.1.2](#) and [177](#)), and reflects Shakespeare's primary concern with a character's function in the dramatic conflict being depicted, not with precise historical identity. When the Dauphin is firmly intended, therefore, later in II.1 and throughout the play, his speeches are headed 'Dolph.' or 'Dol.', not 'Lewis'. The formal correctness of F's opening stage direction to II.1 ('[Enter before Angiers, Philip King of France, Lewis, Daulphin, Austria, Constance, Arthur](#)') might well suggest that it was set out in full after the working out of the scene had clarified the confusion of speech-prefixes with which it begins. In this edition the speeches at II.1.1, 18 and 150 have been given to the French King, and 149 emended accordingly, even at the expense of the slight metrical irregularity.

If the copy for F was an authorial manuscript, an explanation of another problem in Act II may be suggested. The spokesman who appears on the walls of Angiers at II.1.200 is called in the F entry 'a Citizen'. His first four speeches have the prefix 'Cit.', but after the inconclusive battle which follows line 299 he is called, for the rest of the scene, '[Hubert](#)' or 'Hub.' (with the exception of the mistake at 368 already mentioned). The suggestion that this confusion originates in a prompt-book indication that the roles of the citizen and Hubert are to be taken by the same actor is unsatisfactory: there is no comparable example of such confusion based on doubling in any other Shakespeare text, and in any case the cumulative evidence is for authorial, not theatrical, copy for the F text. It seems likely that Shakespeare saw the possibility of merging the roles of the citizen and Hubert during the course of his work on Act II, and that the earlier speech-prefixes were not corrected. The pattern of Hubert's role developing from the uncommitted impersonality of his position at Angiers to his intense self-commitment at the end of the play was thus established, and what would otherwise be his very abrupt entry at III.3 prepared for. (This pattern also explains Shakespeare's later care not to identify Hubert with the 'Hubert de Burgh' of his sources, and

his deliberate reduction of his rank to that of commoner (IV.3.83–7).) Though this is a problem which cannot finally be resolved, such an explanation seems more probable than its alternative and accords better with the remainder of the evidence about the copy from which the F text was set. It has therefore been accepted in this edition.

A final peculiarity of the F text is its act and scene divisions. For the fourth and fifth acts, these present no problem, the repetition of '*Actus Quartus*' (for *Quintus*) at the beginning of Act V being a simple mistake. (Act IV itself is correctly labelled '*Actus Quartus*'.) It is in the first three acts that problems occur. The first scene offers no difficulty: F labels it '*Actus Primus, Scæna Prima*' in full. The second scene, before Angiers, however (Act II, scene 1 in all modern editions), is simply '*Scæna Secunda*' in F, which then has the heading '*Actus Secundus*' (without indication of a scene number) before the entrance of Constance, Arthur and Salisbury at the point where most later editors begin Act III. After seventy-four lines of this scene (the third of the play), there appears in F the full heading '*Actus Tertius, Scæna prima*', followed by the direction for the entry of the royal party and the marking of a new entry for Constance, who had been left seated on the stage in the previous line. How can we explain these divisions? It seems fairly clear that F's '*Scæna Secunda*' is a mistake for *Actus Secundus*, the printer presumably mistaking a '2' or a 'II' in his copy for a scene division rather than an act division. At the next division he would thus have no alternative but to print '*Actus Secundus*' regardless of what was marked in his copy. One of two things might there have appeared: an indication for the beginning of the third act, or an indication for the start of the second scene of the second act. Nearly all editors since the eighteenth century have assumed the former, and, because of the continued presence onstage of Constance after line 74, have disregarded F's marking of the beginning of the third act there. E. A. J. Honigmann, however, argues plausibly for the second of the two possibilities (which would derive again perhaps from the misinterpretation of a figure two in the copy) and also defends F's marking of a new scene before the entry of the royal procession at (in the traditional numbering) III.1.74. In this edition the traditional scene and act division is preserved for convenience of reference, but, as the Commentary to III.1.74 suggests, it does in fact seem likely that some pause, and perhaps even a distinct time-gap, is intended at this point. It has to be remembered, though, that the conditions of the Elizabethan stage allowed scenes to merge into one another in ways which make the rigid scene divisions of later editors inappropriate.

The action after the big processional entry at III.1.74 is both continuous with, and at the same time separated from, what has gone before. The same is true of the last of the problematic scene divisions in F. Editors have traditionally divided the battle in Act III into two scenes (III.2 and III.3), the first only ten lines long. F marks no division here, and does not begin its '*Scæna Tertia*' until the entry of King Philip, the Dauphin and Pandulph (III.4 in modern editions). The traditional division has again been observed in this edition, both for convenience of reference and also because there is evidence of some time-gap between the scenes (discussed in the Commentary headnote to III.3). Here too, however, the fluidity of Elizabethan staging has to be kept in mind.

Beyond these matters the F text presents few problems. Its spelling and punctuation have been modernized in this edition in accordance with the principles of the Penguin Shakespeare series. Speech-prefixes have been expanded and made consistent, and stage directions have been expanded, regularized, or, in some instances, added. Obvious misprints in F have been silently corrected, as have the very few instances of obvious mislineation. Some spelling contractions in F have been expanded (see [Commentary to I.1.9–10](#)). Common colloquial contractions ('o'er', 'to't', 'i'faith', etc.) have of course been preserved, as have elisions between the definite article and words beginning with a vowel ('th'advantage', 'th'assistance', 'th'eternal', etc.), which F marks with apparent attention to metre. A particular problem concerns the occurrences in F of the word 'heaven'. On at least two occasions (III.1.155 and V.7.60) the context makes it quite certain that 'God' was the original reading and that this has been altered to 'heaven', probably in obedience to the Profanity Act of 1606. Several other occurrences of the word 'heaven' in F might equally well represent changes to Shakespeare's intention. Metre provides a guide only in one direction, for 'heaven' is often monosyllabic. Since certainty is impossible on all the other occasions, the F reading has been changed in this edition only in those two instances where the need for emendation is beyond dispute. But a modern director might well be justified in substituting 'God' for 'heaven' at several points.

The following collations record the points (other than those outlined in the preceding paragraph) where this edition departs from the F text; readings in which it differs from other current editions of the play; and the principal modifications to the stage directions. Quotations from F are in the original spelling (with the old 'long s' (ſ))

normalized to modern 's'). The more interesting of the textual questions are discussed in the Commentary.

COLLATIONS

1 Emendations

Departures from the F text are listed below, with the reading of this edition on the left of the square bracket. Those first made in the seventeenth-century reprints of F are attributed (to the second Folio (F2), 1632, the third Folio (F3), 1663–4, or the fourth Folio (F4), 1685). Most of the other emendations were first made by the eighteenth-century editors; a few more recently proposed are attributed to the scholar who first suggested them. Changes to F punctuation are recorded only if the sense is affected.

The Characters in the Play] *not in F*

I.1

- 1 (*and throughout*) Chatillon] *Chatillion*
50 BASTARD] *Philip. (and to 138; thereafter 'Bast.')*
54 (*and throughout*) Coeur-de-lion] *Cordelion*
147 I] *It*
208 smack] *smoake*
209 And so am I – whether] (*this edition*); *And so am I whether*
212 motion – to deliver] (*this edition*); *motion to deliuer*
237 Could he get me! Sir Robert] *Could get me sir Robert*
257 Thou art] (F4); *That art*

II.1

- 0 II.1] *Scæna Secunda.*
1 KING PHILIP] *Lewis.*
18 KING PHILIP] *Lewis.*
63 Ate] *Ace*
106 Geoffrey's. In] *Geffreyes in*
113 breast] (F2); *beast*
144 Alcides' shows] *Alcides shooes*
149 king philip] *King Lewis*
150 KING PHILIP] *Lew.*
152 Anjou] *Angiers*
187–8 And with her plague; her sin his injury, | Her injury the beadle] *And with her plague her sinne: his iniury | Her iniurie the*

Beadle

201, 267, 270, 281 HUBERT] *Cit.* (see above, pp. 105–6)

215 Confronts your] Comfort yours

335 run] (F2); rome

368 HUBERT] *Fra.*

424 niece] neere

425 (and throughout) Dauphin] Dolphin

487 Anjou] Angiers

III.1

0 III.1] *Actus Secundus*

56 She adulterates] Sh'adulterates

74 (F has the heading '*Actus Tertius, Scæna prima.*' after this line; see above, pp. 106–7)

110 day] daies

148 task] tast

155 God] heauen

196 Look to it] (J. C. Maxwell, 1950); Looke to that

259 chafèd] cased

282–7 And makest an oath ... what thou dost swear.] And mak'st
an oath the suretie for thy truth, | Against an oath the truth, thou
art vnsure | To sweare, sweares onely not to be forsworne, | Else
what a mockerie should it be to sweare? | But thou dost sweare,
onely to be forsworne, | And most forsworne, to keepe what thou
dost sweare, |

III.3

0 III.3] (no scene break in F)

III.4

0 III.4] *Scæna Tertia.*

44 not holy] (F4); holy

64 friends] fiends

110 world's] words

182 strong actions] strange actions

IV.1

63 his] this

77 heaven's] heauen

120 mercy-lacking uses] mercy, lacking vses

IV.2

1 again ... again] (F3); againe ... against

- 31 [worsen](#)] (*J. C. Maxwell, 1950*); worse
 42 [when](#)] then
 73 [Doth](#)] Do
- IV.3
- 15 ([and throughout](#)) [Melun](#)] *Meloone*
 33 [man](#)] (F2); mans
 142–4 How easy ... [England up!](#) | [From forth ... royalty](#) | [The life ...](#)] How easie ... *England* vp, | *From forth ... Royaltie?* | *The life ...*
 155 [ceinture](#)] center
- V.1
- 0 [v.1](#)] *Actus Quartus, Scæna prima.*
- V.2
- 26 [Were](#)] (F2); Was
 36 [grapple](#)] cripple
 43 [hast thou fought](#)] (F4); hast fought
 133 [unhaired](#)] vn-heard
- V.5
- 3 [measured](#)] measure
- V.6
- 1–6 ([see Commentary](#))
- V.7
- 16 [invincible](#)] inuisible
 17 [mind](#)] winde
 21 [cygnet](#)] Symet
 60 [God](#)] heauen

2 Rejected emendations

The following list records readings in this edition which differ from those in some modern editions. In most instances the difference arises from the acceptance in this edition of an F reading emended by other editors. Once-accepted emendations no longer current are not recorded, nor are other editors' alterations of 'heaven' to 'God' (see above, p. 108). The reading of this edition is to the left of the square bracket, with the rejected emendation to the right, preceded by the precise F reading (in round brackets) if this is necessary to indicate how the problem arises. When more than one emendation has been

suggested, they are separated by semi-colons. Most of the emendations were first made by the eighteenth-century editors. (The differences between this edition and the 1954 Arden which result from the 1954 Arden editor's exceptional conservatism in handling the F text are not listed here; all the principal emendations of F in this edition are recorded in list 1 above.)

I.1

- 20 [Controlment for controlment](#)] Controlment for control
49 [expeditious](#)] expedition's
75 [But](#)] Now
256–7 [my charge!](#) | [Thou](#)] (my charge, | That); thy charge | That

II.1

- 1–2 [KING PHILIP Before Angiers ...](#) | [Arthur, that great ...](#)] (*Lewis*.
Before *Angiers* ... | *Arthur* that great ...); LEWIS Before *Angiers* ... |
KING PHILIP *Arthur*, that great ... (*Honigmann*; *see above*, pp. 104–5)
18 [A noble](#)] Ah, noble
147–51 [AUSTRIA What cracker ...](#) | [With this ...](#) | [King Philip,](#)
[determine ...](#) | [KING PHILIP Women and fools ...](#) | [King John, this](#)
[...](#)] (*Aust.* What cracker ... | With this ... | King *Lewis*, determine
... | *Lew.* Women & fooles ... | King *Iohn*, this ...); AUSTRIA What
cracker ... | With this ... | KING PHILIP *Lewis*, determine ... | LEWIS
Women and fools ... | KING PHILIP *King John*, this ... (*Honigmann*;
see above, pp. 104–5)
169 [Draws](#)] Draw
184 [he is](#)] he's
201 ([and throughout](#)) [HUBERT](#)] CITIZEN (*see above*, pp. 105–6)
215 [Confronts your](#)] (Comfort yours); Comforts your; Confront
your
234 [Craves](#)] Crave
371 [Kings of our fear](#)] Kinged of our fears
434 [complete of, say](#)] complete, O say; completed say
438 [as she](#)] a she

III.1

- 69 [and](#)] an't
147 [earthly](#)] earthly
148 [task](#)] (tast); tax
259 [chafèd](#)] (cased); caged

III.3

- 2 [So](#)] And; More; Thus

- 26 [tune](#)] time
39 [race](#)] ear; face
52 [brooded](#)] broad-eyed
66 [My lord.](#)] My lord?; My lord!

III.4

- 182 [makes](#)] make

IV.1

- 119 [extends](#)] extend
121 [eye](#)] eyes

IV.2

- 42 [when](#)] (then); the
50 [them](#)] they
66 [Enter Hubert](#)] (*moved to middle of 68 by many editors*)
73 [Doth](#)] (Do); Does
117 [care](#)] ear
131 [Enter the Bastard and Peter of Pomfret](#)] (*moved to middle of 132 by many editors*)
220 [Make](#)] Makes

IV.3

- 16 [with me](#)] witness; notice; missive
33 [man](#)] (mans); manners
41 [You have](#)] Have you

V.2

- 59 [Full warm of blood](#)] Full of warm blood
135 [this pygmy](#)] these pygmy
145 [this](#)] his

V.3

- 10 [was](#)] were

V.4

- 14 [lords](#)] lord
15 [He](#)] Lewis

V.5

- 7 [tottering](#)] tattering

V.6

- 12 [endless](#)] eyeless

V.7

- 16 *invincible*] (invisible); insensible; unusable
 89 *'tis*] it is
 108 *give thanks*] give you thanks

3 Stage directions

The stage directions in this edition are based on those in F. These are, on the whole, rather sparse. The more important changes and additions to the F directions are listed below. The normalization of characters' names in stage directions, minor adjustments to the order in which characters are listed in directions, and the provision of exits and entrances clearly demanded by the context but omitted in F, are not recorded. Nor are asides and indications of the character to whom a particular speech is addressed, all of which are editorial. The reading of this edition is to the left of the square bracket, the F reading to the right.

I.1

- 43 *Enter a sheriff, who whispers to Essex*] *Enter a Sheriffe*
 49 *Enter Robert Faulconbridge and Philip, his bastard brother*] *Enter Robert Faulconbridge, and Philip (at end of 49)*
 219 *Enter Lady Faulconbridge and James Gurney*] *after 221 in F*

II.1

- 0 *Enter on one side King Philip of France, Lewis the Dauphin, Constance, Arthur, lords, and soldiers; on the other side the Archduke of Austria and soldiers*] *Enter before Angiers, Philip King of France, Lewis, Dauphin, Austria, Constance, Arthur*
 75 *A drum beats*] *after 77 in F*
 83 *Enter King John, Queen Eleanor, Blanche, the Bastard, lords, and soldiers*] *Enter K. of England, Bastard, Queene, Blanch, Pembroke, and others*
 200 *A trumpet sounds. Enter Hubert upon the walls*] *Trumpet sounds. Enter a Citizen vpon the walles*
 299 *Exeunt all but Hubert – King John and his followers on one side, King Philip and his followers on the other*] *Exeunt After excursions, enter the Herald of France, with trumpeters, to the gates*] *Heere after excursions, Enter the Herald of France with Trumpets to the gates*
 311 *with trumpeters*] *with Trumpet*
 333 *Enter on one side King John, Queen Eleanor, Blanche, the Bastard, lords, and soldiers; on the other side King Philip, Lewis the Dauphin, Austria, lords, and soldiers*] *Enter the two Kings with their*

powers, at seuerall doores

III.1

69 *She seats herself on the ground*] (placed after 74 by most editors)
not in F

74 *Exit Salisbury with Arthur, leaving Constance seated*] not in F
Enter King John, King Philip, Queen Eleanor, Lewis the Dauphin,
Blanche, the Bastard, Austria, and attendants] *Enter King Iohn,*
France, Dolphin, Blanch, Elianor, Philip, Austria, Constance

83 *rising*] not in F

III.2

4 *Enter King John, Arthur, and Hubert*] after 3 in F

III.3

18 *She takes Arthur aside*] not in F

IV.1

7 *The executioners withdraw*] not in F

32 *He shows Arthur the warrant*] not in F

70 *Hubert stamps his foot*] not in F

71 *The executioners come forward with ropes and irons*] not in F

IV.2

68 *He takes Hubert aside*] not in F

82 *coming forward*] not in F

102 *Exeunt Pembroke, Salisbury, and the other lords*] *Exeunt*

105 *Enter a Messenger*] after 103 in F

159 *Exit Hubert with Peter of Pomfret*] not in F

IV.3

8 *He leaps down*] not in F

34 *He sees Arthur's body*] not in F

78 *He draws his sword*] not in F

V.1

1 *giving the crown to Cardinal Pandulph*] not in F

2 *returning the crown*] not in F

V.2

63 *A trumpet sounds*] not in F

64 *Enter Cardinal Pandulph*] after 63 in F

116 *A trumpet sounds*] not in F

V.7

- 10 *Exit Bigot*] *not in F*
- 27 *King John is brought in by Bigot and other attendants*] *Iohn*
brought in
- 64 *King John dies*] *not in F*

Appendix: King John and The Troublesome Reign

Shakespeare's *King John* has usually been thought to be based on a two-part play, published anonymously in 1591, with the following title: 'The Troublesome Raigne Of John King of England, with the discoverie of King Richard Cordelions Base sonne (vulgarly named, The Bastard Fawconbridge): also the death of King John at Swinstead Abbey. As it was (sundry times) publikey acted by the Queenes Majesties Players, in the honourable Citie of London'. The play was reprinted in 1611 as the work of 'W. Sh.' and again in 1622, this time more boldly as by 'W. Shakespeare'. No one now takes the idea of Shakespearian authorship seriously, though it has occasionally been suggested that *The Troublesome Reign* might be closer to an earlier (but authentic) version of Shakespeare's play than it is to the text of *King John* as we have it. But speculation about lost originals is necessarily unfruitful; the problem of the relationship between *King John* and *The Troublesome Reign* must be faced on the basis of the evidence available.

King John and *The Troublesome Reign* correspond, in terms of plot, almost scene by scene. *The Troublesome Reign* is somewhat longer (3,081 lines, against Shakespeare's 2,715) and contains a few extra scenes and many additional characters (more than fifty-five speaking parts, against some twenty-five in *King John*). The traditional view was that Shakespeare wrote *King John* with reference to no other source than *The Troublesome Reign*, adapting, abbreviating and rewriting the rather rambling play. This was challenged by E. A. J. Honigmann in his 1954 Arden edition of *King John*. He showed, almost beyond dispute, that at various points in the text Shakespeare used material from Holinshed (and possibly from other historians too) which does not appear in *The Troublesome Reign* (see [Commentary to I.1.0](#); [IV.2.120–21](#), [162](#), [187](#) and [209–14](#); [IV.3.12–13](#) and [14–17](#); [V.3.16](#); [V.6.30](#); and [V.7.99–100](#)). This conclusion has been accepted by most scholars. More controversial, however, was Professor Honigmann's attempt, stemming from this demonstration that *The Troublesome Reign*

was not Shakespeare's only source, to show that the play was not a source at all, but was in fact derived from *King John*. Arguing on the basis of what he presented as inconsistencies in the text of *The Troublesome Reign* attributable to imperfect recollections of Shakespeare's play, Professor Honigmann reversed the traditional theory of the order of composition and suggested that *The Troublesome Reign* was a reconstruction of *King John* based on experience of it in the theatre. In consequence of this, he dated *King John* before 1591, much earlier than the usually suggested date of composition. Professor Honigmann's theory has not won widespread approval, but it was adopted, with some new arguments in its favour, by the next editor of *King John* to face the problem fully, William H. Matchett in his Signet edition (1966). In the Commentary to the present edition (where detailed examination of the question would have been inappropriate) Shakespeare's dependence on *The Troublesome Reign* is assumed. Some reasons for accepting this traditional theory of the order of composition of the plays are here put forward. (Quotations and references to source material are from the editions cited in the note at the head of the Commentary.)

The direct debt to Holinshed which Professor Honigmann demonstrated at certain points in *King John* is constantly apparent in *The Troublesome Reign*. The anonymous play is full of material not in Shakespeare, most of it obviously derived from an independent reading of Holinshed. Whichever playwright worked second, therefore, he went beyond his source play for extra material. No conclusions about priority can thus be reached on what, at first, might seem the promising basis of one play including events or episodes not present in the other. The problem is more complex than that.

Professor Honigmann and Professor Matchett put forward a number of textual points which, they suggest, show the author of *The Troublesome Reign* confusing, or misunderstanding or needlessly labouring, what is clear or adequate in Shakespeare. These cannot be discussed individually here. They are all, however, open to this objection: the author who worked first from the chronicles undertook a massive reorganization of historical material; it would not be surprising if some loose ends, mixed motives, internal contradictions, remained in his text; the playwright working second had the advantage of a much simpler dramatic source to work from and it might be expected, therefore, that it would be the later play that would be sharper in its plotting and focus. At nearly all the points where it is suggested that *The Troublesome Reign*, through its author's

inadequate grasp of Shakespeare's play, makes crude or muddled what is subtle or direct in *King John*, one can equally argue that we are observing Shakespeare's refining hand at work (see [Commentary to II.1.141–2](#) and [504–9](#); [IV.3.11](#); [V.1.25–9](#); [V.4.40–42](#); and the headnotes to several scenes, in particular [IV.1](#) and [V.6](#)).

While the treatment of particular episodes in the plays thus provides arguments on both sides of the question, a number of general considerations strongly suggest the priority of *The Troublesome Reign*. *King John* was not printed until the Folio of 1623. A play based on it is therefore likely to be a reconstruction of theatrical experience of it. This is, in fact, what Professors Honigmann and Matchett suggest. They compare it with other 'bad' texts derived from Shakespeare – *The Taming of a Shrew* (usually thought to derive from Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*), or *The First Part of the Contention betwixt the Famous Houses of York and Lancaster* and *The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York* (from Shakespeare's *Henry VI, Parts II and III*). The principal difficulty with this theory is that, though *King John* and *The Troublesome Reign* are so close in terms of plot, their verbal similarities are slight – two or three lines and a few phrases and snatches in common comprise the sum of the debt. What is more, many of the points where the words of the two texts coincide have to do with precise historical facts: the terms of a dowry, lists of provinces claimed, details of military campaigns, etc. (see [Commentary to I.1.11](#); [II.1.527–8](#), [529–30](#) and [538](#); and [V.1.30–32](#)). If *King John* is the earlier play, one must therefore imagine the author of *The Troublesome Reign* as a man capable of remembering, with meticulous care, the details of a plot from scene to scene throughout an entire play; capable also of getting by heart one or two lines and pieces of information of a rather precise kind; and with the ability, finally, to forget the whole of the rest of Shakespeare's language. Not even the often-repeated jibe of the Bastard at Austria, 'And hang a calf's-skin on those recreant limbs', remained in his memory.

A second peculiarity of the hypothetical adapter of *King John* is that he constantly imports from the chronicles pieces of additional information not given in Shakespeare's play. That Shakespeare himself (if he wrote second) occasionally went beyond *The Troublesome Reign* has been shown. But this is for small extra details, tiny modifications. The author of *The Troublesome Reign* adds extra material on a large scale. It makes his play considerably longer than Shakespeare's, and it increases his cast – neither of these very likely characteristics of the hurried adaptation which Professor Honigmann suggests. More

significant, however, is the fact that the importations from Holinshed into *The Troublesome Reign* frequently obscure an issue clear in Shakespeare. One example of this can be cited. When the barons – and twice as many as in *King John* are included by name – state their grievances against their King, they list his banishment of Chester, his failure to respect their privileges and his murder of Arthur as the causes of their rising. Although the second motive is vaguely present in *King John* (see [Commentary to V.2.21](#)), Shakespeare concentrates almost exclusively on the third motive. But it is the first item in *The Troublesome Reign*'s list that is interesting: it comes directly from Holinshed, who has previously dealt with the King's quarrel with the Earl of Chester. This has not been mentioned in *The Troublesome Reign*. Apparently the anonymous author – in the middle of making his bold stroke of using the death of Arthur (reported under 1202 in Holinshed) as a motive for the baronial uprising of 1216 – carelessly included one of the genuinely historical motives of his source, without any preparation for it. This would be quite understandable; but it is much more difficult to imagine a reason for his importing this confusing detail if he was working from what is already so straightforward in Shakespeare.

The author of *The Troublesome Reign*, if he is adapting *King John*, and doing so (as Professor Honigmann suggests) hurriedly, to take advantage of the stage success of Shakespeare's play, not only found time to add a lot of irrelevant details from Holinshed. He also took the trouble to alter the whole focus of *King John*, creating, from the subtle and penetrative picture of political actions which Shakespeare offers, a simplistic and polemical interpretation of events, with the King as a precursor of the Reformation who, as the Prologue tells us, 'for Christ's true faith' endured 'many a storm' and 'set himself against the Man of Rome'. To bolster his anti-Catholic purposes, the anonymous author offers, in a scene for which there is no equivalent in Shakespeare, an episode on the Bastard's tour of the monasteries which reveals, with broad humour, the corruptions of the clergy. He also shows the planning, and the achievement, of the poisoning of John by the monk, only briefly reported in Shakespeare's V.6. *The Troublesome Reign*, in fact, is a play with a consistently anti-Catholic thrust; Shakespeare's different perspectives on the same historical material were discussed in the Introduction. If we take *The Troublesome Reign* to be based on *King John* we have to imagine an adapter capable of frequently muddling and garbling what is clear in Shakespeare, and yet capable, on the other hand, of pursuing, with

clear-sighted consistency, his purposes of Protestant polemic. The mixture is as odd as the idea of the man with a precise memory for plot and almost none for language, or of the hurried adapter with time to go back in great detail over the chronicles.

There is one more oddity of the hypothetical adapter working from experience of *King John* in the theatre, and that is his almost unflinching blindness to the powerful theatrical moments of Shakespeare's play. The grief of Constance and its attendant speeches virtually disappear in *The Troublesome Reign*; the temptation of Hubert by John in III.3 is reduced to four dull, obscure lines; the prison scene becomes a debate on political behaviour instead of the clash of human emotion that it is in Shakespeare; and the near murder of Hubert by the barons, and his rescue by the Bastard, over the corpse of Arthur, are all lost. Perhaps the supposed adapter might have failed to respond to the effect of these scenes, but surely he cannot have missed so much of the Bastard's part. That he, or his publisher, was aware of the appeal of the Bastard is shown by their mentioning him first after the main title of the play on the title page of *The Troublesome Reign*. The Bastard's role in the anonymous play is lively certainly, but it lacks all the fire and brilliance of Shakespeare's presentation. At times, indeed, the Bastard of *The Troublesome Reign* is pompous and long-winded. Most noticeable about the role, however, is that it entirely lacks the soliloquies which Shakespeare gives to the Bastard in *King John*.

Neither Professor Honigsmann nor Professor Matchett argues that the text of *The Troublesome Reign* is the result of an actor or actors putting together memories of Shakespeare's play – a frequent origin for 'bad quartos'. If this had been so, one role, at least, must have shown a closer verbal relationship to Shakespeare. The theory must be, therefore, that the author of *The Troublesome Reign* experienced *King John* as a member of the audience, and the absence of any sign of the Bastard's soliloquies cannot therefore be ascribed to the notion that they were never heard by members of the cast pirating the text. Yet those two brilliant early soliloquies, with their witty satire of social pretensions, their humour, their bawdy, their devastating analysis of political motives, must have been as popular with Elizabethan audiences as they are with modern ones. It is extraordinary that there should be no trace of them in *The Troublesome Reign* if its author had seen a performance of *King John* as we know it. Indeed the whole demotion of importance of the role of the Bastard, the sharp reduction in the number of his lines (set against the overall increase in the length of the play), the failure to reflect the central focus that

Shakespeare gives him in Acts IV and V, argue strongly against the possibility that *The Troublesome Reign* derives from an attempt to capitalize upon the theatrical success of Shakespeare's play.

These general considerations, then, make it unlikely that *The Troublesome Reign* is a bad quarto of *King John* in any normally accepted sense of that term. We might, however, still imagine a man writing the play after seeing *King John* if we supposed him to be a vigorous Protestant burning to explore issues that he felt Shakespeare had inexcusably left out of his play, going back over the chronicles to do so and picking up a good deal of extra, irrelevant information in the process and including it in his play as a sign of independent research, and then, having deliberately cleared his mind of all memories of Shakespeare's language except for a few details of history which, though mainly available in the chronicles, he had most precisely learned by heart from Shakespeare, writing a play that eschewed all the theatrical high-points that *King John* had achieved and substituted a longer exploration of the historical and religious material. Such a man is indeed difficult to imagine, especially if we accept Professor Honigmann's theory that he worked in a hurry, getting his text published soon after he had seen Shakespeare's play produced, but he is still just conceivable. In order to dispose of him finally, one or two textual details must be examined.

Professor Honigmann rightly points out that the quality of the stage directions is often an indication of a 'bad' text. Long descriptive directions may be a sign that an author is reporting what he has seen, not working at first hand. There are several such long directions in *The Troublesome Reign*, and they provide Professor Honigmann's strongest evidence that it is a 'bad' text (other characteristics he points to could as well be the result of the printer working from the author's rough copy or 'foul papers'). Only one or two of these long directions, however, have any relationship to the events of *King John* (see, for example, Commentary to the stage direction at I.1.43). The great majority of them report events not depicted in Shakespeare's play. The following examples will illustrate this (references are to the line numbers of *The Troublesome Reign*): I.655: '*Excursions. The Bastard chaseth Lymoges the Austrich Duke, and maketh him leave the lion's skin*' – Shakespeare does not use this preliminary to the Bastard's killing of Austria; I.1088: '*Excursions. Eleanor is rescued by John, and Arthur is taken prisoner. Exeunt. Sound victory*' – Shakespeare does not show the capture of Arthur and he deliberately has the Bastard, not John, rescuing Queen Eleanor (III.2.7); I.1180: '*Enter Philip leading a Friar,*

charging him to show where the Abbot's gold lay' – the scene of the Bastard in the monastery is entirely absent in Shakespeare; I.1583: 'There the five moons appear' – in *King John* the five moons are mentioned (IV.2.182), but do not appear; II.982: 'Enter two friars laying a cloth' – Shakespeare does not show the scene of John's poisoning, only reporting it in V.6; II.1105: 'Enter Pandulph, young Henry, the barons with daggers in their hands' – Shakespeare offers no hint of this dramatic entry in the calm, sad discussion in the Swinstead orchard at the beginning of V.7; II.1184: 'They crown young Henry' – Shakespeare shows no such coronation at the end of *King John*. Whatever the author of *The Troublesome Reign* is doing, therefore, he is not reporting Shakespeare's play.

The stage directions can also be used interestingly from the opposite direction. At several points *King John* and *The Troublesome Reign* call for entries of characters and list them in the same order or with similar wording (see *King John* [I.1.0](#), *The Troublesome Reign* [I.0](#); [II.1.200](#), [I.612](#); [IV.3.0](#), [II.0](#); [IV.3.10](#), [II.26](#)). Since *King John* was not printed until 1623, the author of *The Troublesome Reign* cannot have seen the order in which Shakespeare listed these entries (and it would not, of course, have any necessary relationship to their stage presentation). If Shakespeare was working from a printed text of *The Troublesome Reign*, however, the reason for the coincidence is obvious. The point can be taken a little further by comparing the first stage direction in each play. *The Troublesome Reign* reads: 'Enter King John, Queen Eleanor his mother, William Marshall Earl of Pembroke, the Earls of Essex and of Salisbury'. *King John* has 'Enter King John, Queen Eleanor, Pembroke, Essex, and Salisbury, with the Chatillon of France' (the embassy comes a few lines later in *The Troublesome Reign*). Apart from the remarkable similarity of order, the part of Essex is odd. In Shakespeare's play he introduces the Faulconbridge law case, a function which the historical Essex would appropriately have performed (see [Commentary to I.1.0](#)). But he speaks only three lines, and he is never addressed by name. In *The Troublesome Reign* Essex is frequently addressed by name and has a larger part both here and throughout the play (see [also Commentary to IV.2.162](#)). Since Essex's name is never used onstage in *King John* it is impossible that the author of *The Troublesome Reign* introduced him there through theatrical experience of Shakespeare's play. And since the first scenes of both plays deal with the unhistorical episode of Chatillon's embassy, a common source in Holinshed is out of the question.

One other textual point which disproves the possibility of *The*

Troublesome Reign's coming after Shakespeare's *King John* concerns the problem of Hubert and the Citizen of Angiers. On balance it seems likely that Shakespeare decided, in the course of working on the play, to merge the roles of Hubert and the citizen who appears as spokesman on the city walls in Act II. The problem is a complex one, but either this, or the theory that one actor played both roles and that this was somehow reflected in the printer's copy (see [Commentary to the stage direction at II.1.200](#) and [An Account of the Text](#), pp. 105–6), seems to provide the only solution. Both Professor Honigmann and Professor Matchett treat the roles of the Citizen and Hubert as one. But such an identification is impossible if we assume that *King John* precedes *The Troublesome Reign*, for in the latter the roles are quite separate, the Citizen's speech-prefixes clearly labelled throughout the Angiers scenes. The anonymous text cannot therefore derive from Shakespeare's play if the roles were amalgamated there. But the problem that we have in Shakespeare's text might easily arise if Shakespeare conceived the idea of bringing the roles together while working on the Angiers episode from a printed copy of *The Troublesome Reign*.

Both general and particular evidence, then, seems to justify the treatment of *The Troublesome Reign* as Shakespeare's principal source for *King John*.

Genealogical Table

THE FAMILY OF HENRY II

NOTE: Henry II had other children: this is a simplified table designed to show those of his descendants who are important in *King John*. The names of those who appear in the play are in italics. Italicized dates are those of reigns. Other dates are those of birth (where known) and death.

Commentary

F refers to the first Folio (1623), the only authoritative text of the play (see [An Account of the Text](#)). The reasons for regarding the anonymous play *The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England* as the source for *King John* are discussed in the Appendix to this edition. Since Shakespeare seems to have worked more closely with this play than with any other source he used, his methods of adaptation are examined in some detail in the following Commentary (particularly in the headnotes to each scene). No attempt has been made, however, to record all the minor verbal parallels between the two plays. Quotations from *The Troublesome Reign* are modernized from the edition of Geoffrey Bullough, and references follow his system of numbering lines consecutively throughout each part. Quotations from Holinshed are modernized from the 1587 edition of the *Chronicles*, and biblical quotations from the Bishops' Bible (1568, etc.), the official translation of Elizabeth's reign.

I.1

The material for this scene comes from *The Troublesome Reign*. It is unhistorical: Holinshed records no embassy from France at the beginning of John's reign, and Arthur's claims were to English territories in France, not to the English crown itself. The scene is probably to be imagined as taking place soon after John's accession in 1199, and presumably in London (line 45 refers to a controversy *Come from the country*). Shakespeare omits a preliminary episode of twenty lines in *The Troublesome Reign* in which Queen Eleanor presents John to the assembled English nobles as 'a second hope' after his brother, Coeur-de-lion, likely to emulate him 'in rule and virtue both' (I.6–7). This assertion of John's rightful claim, paralleling Holinshed's account of King Richard's bequeathing to John 'the crown of England and all other his lands and dominions', is significantly replaced in Shakespeare by Queen Eleanor's suggestion that John may be a usurper (40–41). This view of John is set against our first impression of him as an English monarch defying an embassy

from France. The contrast immediately establishes our ambivalent attitude towards the King.

The arrival of the Faulconbridges, and the bastardy trial and its repercussions, which form the second element of the scene, are also adapted from *The Troublesome Reign's* unhistorical material. Shakespeare keeps Lady Faulconbridge absent from the scene until the Bastard has accepted his royal parentage; she arrives merely to confirm it. In *The Troublesome Reign* she is present to hear the accusation of her own adultery, which leaves the scene much less light-hearted than Shakespeare's alteration makes possible.

A formal staging is required, with King John central and dominant: whatever the rights and wrongs of his possession of power, he is seen in this scene as the English monarch facing foreign aggression and dispensing justice to his subjects. The contrast between this state formality and the witty informality of the Bastard's soliloquy which follows is a significant factor in Shakespeare's creation of the intimate relationship between the Bastard and the audience.

- 0 **King John:** John (1167–1216), the fifth-born and youngest son of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine, succeeded his brother Richard I on the English throne in 1199. The succession was disputed in Anjou, Maine and Touraine, where Arthur's claims were supported. It is on this aspect of the reign, and the more lengthy dispute with the Papacy, that Shakespeare's play concentrates, though with enormous modifications of historical chronology. John's quarrel with Rome and his vigorous exactions of ecclesiastical wealth gave him a bad name with contemporary monkish chroniclers. This traditional view still survives, though in the Tudor period it was much modified by Protestant historians who saw John's quarrel with Rome as a forerunner of the Reformation. Both views are present in Shakespeare's play.

Queen Eleanor: Eleanor of Aquitaine, Queen, successively, of France and England, was born about 1122 and married Henry of Anjou, later Henry II of England, in 1152 after her divorce from Louis VII of France. She played an important part in securing the throne for John after the death of Richard I, and remained an important figure in politics until her death in 1204. The role, though small, is forceful; the irascible old lady dominates her son during the early scenes, shows a penetrating grasp of political reality, recognizes the worth of the Bastard Faulconbridge and

takes him into royal service, and is at the centre of affairs in France.

Pembroke: William Marshall, Earl of Pembroke, consistently loyal servant of Henry II and his sons, was one of John's chief advisers, and, after John's death, regent of the realm during the minority of Henry III. He died in 1219. The treachery to John which Shakespeare (following *The Troublesome Reign*) shows in Acts IV and V is unhistorical; Holinshed, however, records that Pembroke's eldest son joined the Dauphin; this is doubtless the reason for the confusion.

Essex: The Earl of Essex at the beginning of John's reign was Geoffrey Fitzpeter, who died in 1213. Holinshed refers to him as Lord Chief Justice, and this may be the reason why Shakespeare gives him the lines which introduce the Faulconbridge case. In *The Troublesome Reign* the Faulconbridge affair is first introduced by Salisbury. Since Essex's name is not used in the dialogue, however, such precision is of no theatrical value.

Salisbury: Historically, this is William Longsword, or Longspée, natural son of Henry II (and thus John's half-brother). He inherited the earldom of Salisbury through his wife. Neither Shakespeare nor *The Troublesome Reign*, however, shows any awareness of this blood relationship to the King, though it is clear in Holinshed. Salisbury does not speak in this scene, and his only real importance in the play is as a leader of the baronial revolt in Acts IV and V. Historically this was only a brief interlude in a career notable for loyalty and service. He died in 1226.

with Chatillon of France: F reads *with the Chattyllion of France*, a form indicative of an office or function (Chastilian, Chatelain) rather than a personal title. But there is no definite article at his next entry (II.1.49) and the title seems to be used as a straightforward name at 1 and 30 below and at II.1.46, 51 and 53, so that the intrusive *the* here seems likely to be a mistake. The F spelling (*Chattyllion*) may be an attempt to show the long sound of the French double *l* – this, rather than four full syllables, is all that the metre requires.

- 1 *what would France with us*: What does the King of France desire with us? The abbreviations *France* and *England* are often used to refer to their respective monarchs, usually when one monarch is speaking to or about another. They are not used by subjects of their own king (thus Chatillon pointedly expands John's form at 2). The King of France at the time of John's accession was Philip

II, called Augustus (1165–1223), who had succeeded to the throne in 1180.

- 3 *In my behaviour*: Through me, in my person.
- 4 *borrowed majesty*: The outright accusation of usurpation quickly destroys the false mood of courtesy.
- 6 *embassy*: Message brought by the ambassador.
- 7 *in right and true behalf*: Justly representing the just claims.
- 8 *thy deceased brother Geoffrey*: This is the fourth-born son of Henry II, born in 1158, a year after Richard I, and nine years before John. He became Count of Brittany through his marriage in 1181 to Constance (see [second note to 32](#)), and died in 1186 – three years before his father.
- 9–11 *Arthur Plantagenet ... Touraine, Maine*: Arthur, the posthumous son of Geoffrey by Constance of Brittany, was born in 1187. The law of primogeniture, firmly established in Shakespeare's time but not entirely so in John's, would make his claim to the English crown better than his uncle's. Historically, as Holinshed makes clear, Richard I's will was undisputed in England, where John inherited his brother's power virtually unchallenged. Arthur's claim was not to England, but to certain provinces of the English empire in France (though Holinshed records Arthur claiming the English crown when his hopes in France are finally ruined and he is John's prisoner). Shakespeare follows *The Troublesome Reign* in simplifying and exaggerating Arthur's initial demands in order to produce a clear dramatic conflict. He also presents Arthur, who was seventeen in 1204, when he probably died, as a helpless child. The audience's resultant sympathy for him adds to the ambivalence of the political situation.
- 9–10 *Plantagenet ... territories*: The metre requires that both words should be pronounced with three rather than four syllables ('Plantag'net', 'territ'ries'). There are many examples in the play of such unaccented or scarcely pronounced syllables. On a number of occasions these are indicated by the F spelling. For example at V.1.21 and 49 the spellings *blustring* and *threatner* appear. But F is inconsistent in this, and an actor might prefer to sound such syllables lightly (while preserving the rhythm of the line), rather than try to pronounce something printed, for example, as *fall'n* (IV.3.153). In this edition, therefore, all words with syllables elided for metrical reasons have been printed in full, and only in those instances where the modern pronunciation

is markedly different from that required by the metre have notes been included in the Commentary. F's carefully observed metrical elisions between the definite article and a word beginning in a vowel have, however, been preserved.

- 10 *territories*: Dependent possessions (listed in the following line).
- 11 *Poitiers, Anjou, Touraine, Maine*: Possessions of the English royal family in central and western France. The list here, with *Ireland*, is precisely repeated from *The Troublesome Reign*, I.33–4, with Shakespeare taking over the mistake of Poitiers (the town) for Poitou (the province).
- 12 *Desiring*: Requiring, commanding.
sword: The sceptre was the normal symbol of authority; the change to *sword* is a covert accusation that John rules *usurpingly* (13).
- 13 *sways*: Controls, governs.
several titles: Distinct, divers lordships (those just listed).
- 16 *disallow of*: Deny, refuse to admit.
- 17 *proud control*: Compulsion or constraint matching the arrogance of your refusal to submit.
- 22 *The farthest limit of my embassy*: Which is as far as my power as ambassador permits me to go.
- 24 *as lightning*: Presaging the *thunder* of John's *cannon* at 26.
- 25 *ere thou canst report I will be there*: John is as good as his word: he arrives at Angiers before Chatillon can complete his message to the French King (II.1.57–9 and 76–8). John's speed and vigour in defence of the English crown add strength to his claim to rule, and contrast with the powerlessness of Arthur. Later in the play, however, John's speed, previously the wonder of the French (III.4.11–14), is ironically turned against him by the Dauphin (IV.2.113–15). (Holinshed refers to John's speed in certain campaigns, but *The Troublesome Reign* makes little of the idea; the emphasis on it is Shakespeare's.)
report: Deliver your message (with a pun on *report* meaning 'the noise of an explosion', as of *thunder*, 26).
- 26 *cannon*: Guns of any sort were unknown in England in John's reign, and they do not appear in *The Troublesome Reign*. John's threat here, however, is fulfilled – cannon are prominent in the siege of Angiers in II.1. Shakespeare's anachronism allows a more exciting theatrical representation of the battle scenes.
- 27 *trumpet of our wrath*: Trumpets were used to herald the imminent arrival of persons of rank (especially on the stage);

Chatillon will give similarly short warning of John's approach.

28 *sullen presage of your own decay*: Dismal foreteller of your own ruin.

29 *conduct*: Escort.

31–43 *What now, my son? ... and you and I, shall hear*: John's conversation with his mother could be presented as an entirely private conference. But John's strong assertion of his possession and right (39) has the ring of a deliberately public utterance, and his mother's preceding criticism of his conduct of affairs must presumably, therefore, be publicly voiced. Queen Eleanor's sharp retort to John's vaunt is clearly, however, not for the general ear.

32 *How that*: That (or 'how'). The addition of 'that' to such words as 'how', 'if', 'for', 'when', etc., providing added emphasis, is not uncommon in Elizabethan English.

ambitious Constance: Arthur's mother, Constance, daughter of Conon, Duke of Brittany and Earl of Richmond, had married as her first husband Geoffrey Plantagenet. Holinshed records that, in 1199 (the year of John's accession), she left her second husband, the Earl of Chester, and 'married herself to the lord Guy de Thouars'. The author of *The Troublesome Reign* ignores these later marriages, and Shakespeare goes even further in emphasizing Constance's widowhood (II.1.32 and 548; III.1.14 and 108; III.4.46, 105, etc.) in order to ensure her pathetic appeal. Her vigorous assertion of her son's rights is paralleled by Eleanor's assertion of John's; their rivalry works to considerable dramatic effect in II.1, and the balance between them is maintained even in the account of their deaths (IV.2.120–23). Eleanor's accusation here looks forward to this later rivalry; it derives from *The Troublesome Reign*, I.53–4 (where the Queen Mother asserts that Arthur's 'headstrong mother pricks him' on), and ultimately from Holinshed, who records that Eleanor was 'moved ... by envy conceived against' Constance, believing that, if Arthur achieved power, she 'would look to bear most rule within the realm'.

35 *made whole*: Brought to an agreement, set right.

36 *easy arguments of love*: Expressions of friendship which could have been made without effort.

37 *manage*: Government, rulers.

40–41 *Your strong possession ... with you and me*: Queen Eleanor's statement of her son's usurpation is an important indication of the political situation at an early point in the play, and is Shakespeare's deliberate addition to his source material. Queen

Eleanor refers again to John's unsure tenure of the crown at II.1.470–71.

- 43 *Enter a sheriff, who whispers to Essex*: F reads simply *Enter a Sheriffe*, but some sort of communication is essential before Essex can make his announcement. In *The Troublesome Reign* the direction '*Enter the shrieve, and whispers the Earl of Salisbury in the ear*' appears, and it seems natural to imagine similar business here. Some editors place the direction earlier so that the conference can take place during Queen Eleanor's aside to John. This might be a suitable method of staging, provided the audience's attention is not distracted from the important exchange taking place between the King and his mother. The sheriff's whispering would then mirror Queen Eleanor's whispering in John's ear (42) which the audience is overhearing.
- 44–5 *the strangest controversy ... judged by you*: The Faulconbridge case has apparently proved too troublesome to be settled by local justice, and therefore comes before the King as the ultimate court of appeal. Robert is the plaintiff and must state his case before his half-brother has to put up any defence. The dispute provides an interesting parallel with the dispute over the Coeur-de-lion inheritance between John and Arthur.
- 48 *Our abbeyes and our priories shall pay*: John's constant arguments with the monastic orders over taxation are reported at intervals by Holinshed, who sees them as the reason for the clergy's unfavourable accounts of John in their chronicles. The reference here looks forward to the Bastard's expedition in search of clerical wealth (III.3.6–9). This aspect of the reign is made much more of in the consistently anti-Catholic mood of *The Troublesome Reign*.
- 49 *expeditious*: Speedy, sudden.
Robert Faulconbridge: The character is unhistorical. Shakespeare has brought theatrical interest to the role by adding to the earnest pomposity of the character he found in *The Troublesome Reign* the excessive thinness which allows the Bastard's jokes at 92–4 and 138–47. His contrast with his half-brother must be obvious, not only in physique but also in general demeanour: John automatically addresses him as *Sirrah* (90 and 116), an indignity to which he does not subject the Bastard.
Philip, his bastard brother: Shakespeare has adapted the Bastard's role from *The Troublesome Reign*, expanding and deepening it to give it central importance. The character presented in the play is unhistorical, though Holinshed has one reference to 'Philip,

bastard son to King Richard, to whom his father had given the castle and honour of Coinack', who, in 1199, 'killed the Viscount of Limoges, in revenge of his father's death'. There is no further reference to him in the chronicle. It is possible that *The Troublesome Reign* and Shakespeare build on a popular tradition of King Richard's bastard son, but surviving play and ballad texts dealing with Faulconbridge are all later than *King John*. The Bastard is unique in Shakespeare's history plays in being an unhistorical character who has a direct influence on the political events of the play.

The Bastard's name presents something of a problem. F's speech-prefixes call him *Philip* until he admits his bastardy in the speech beginning at 138, and thereafter almost always *Bast*. This has been used throughout this edition. Its disadvantage is that it keeps the fact of the Bastard's illegitimacy constantly before the reader's eyes; this is not so onstage, where the Bastard's courage and loyalty seem, by the penultimate scene, to leave him as the only person with a legitimate claim to be John's successor. But the alternative name 'Faulconbridge' is clearly unsuitable, since much of this first scene is devoted to disproving the Bastard's Faulconbridge descent. Later in the scene he is renamed by King John, but his new knightly title seems to have little impact on those around him (see [the note to 160–62](#)). The problem of the Bastard's name, indeed, provides a demonstration in miniature of the fact that Shakespeare wrote for the theatre and not for the printed page.

50–54 *Your faithful subject I ... knighted in the field*: The Bastard's first words introduce immediately a new sharpness of language into the play. This is the first hint of the linguistic exuberance that will rapidly become a dominant element in the verbal pattern.

53 *honour-giving*: Suggesting the special distinction or *honour* being conferred by a hand so renowned as Coeur-de-lion's.

54 *Coeur-de-lion*: Richard (1157–99), third-born son of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine, succeeded his father on the English throne in 1189. His prowess as a crusader won him a legendary reputation. It is this image of him, and of his reign, in contrast to the sordid present, which is important in the play. The legend that he acquired his nickname by encountering a lion unarmed and thrusting his arm down its throat and removing its heart is alluded to at 265–8 and II.1.3 and 141–2. F consistently spells the

name *Cordelion*. The metre always requires that this should be accented on the French pattern (on the first and third syllables). The French spelling has therefore been adopted in this edition as the one more familiar to modern readers. But F's anglicized form perhaps offers a reminder of the immediacy and familiarity of Richard's heroic reputation for Shakespeare's audiences.

knighted in the field: Though Sir Robert's prowess as a begetter of sons is later mocked (236–40), such an honour as that mentioned here would be reserved for the bravest soldiers and is another instance of the establishment of an aura of chivalry and honour about the preceding reign.

58 *You came not of one mother then, it seems*: John assumes paternal infidelity. In fact Robert Faulconbridge has undertaken the considerable legal difficulty of proving maternal infidelity in order to disinherit his brother.

60 *well known*: Certain, clear.

61–3 *for the certain knowledge ... as all men's children may*: A repeated joke in Shakespeare. The doubt is proverbial: 'It is a wise child that knows its own father.'

62 *put you o'er*: Refer you.

64 *Out on thee*: Away, begone.

65 *diffidence*: Distrust, suspicion.

68 *'a pops me out*: He turns me out from, disinherits me of.

69 *fair five hundred pound*: Fully five hundred pounds. The singular noun to express a sum of money is typical of the Bastard's colloquialism of expression.

71 *blunt*: Abrupt, unceremonious.

71–4 *Why, being younger born ... bastardy*: King John presumably intends his *Why* to mean 'upon what grounds'. The Bastard's reply, syntactically compressed, first takes *Why* to mean 'for what purpose', and only in its second line picks up the sense the King intends. In either sense the question is redundant, for answers to both questions have clearly emerged in the preceding dialogue. King John is obviously unable to keep pace with the Bastard's mental, and verbal, agility.

74 *once*: (1) In short, to put it briefly or (2) on one occasion (Robert not since having had the courage to repeat the slander). Probably both meanings are present, the Bastard beginning with the intention of succinctly offering John the information he seeks, but turning this into an opportunity to mock his half-brother's cowardice.

- 75 *whether*: Whether.
- 76 *That still I lay upon my mother's head*: I leave that strictly to my mother.
- 78 *Fair fall the bones that took the pains for me*: May good befall the man (or the soul of the man, now dead) who took the trouble to beget me!
- 85–90 *He hath a trick of Coeur-de-lion's face ... perfect Richard*: Queen Eleanor's instinctive recognition of her son in the Bastard, and John's immediate agreement, are an improvement on *The Troublesome Reign*, where the Bastard's resemblance to Coeur-de-Lion is asserted by Robert Faulconbridge as one of the arguments for disinheriting his half-brother. Queen Eleanor's immediate response here establishes the Bastard's unmistakably regal appearance; thus early in the play we are asked to see him as inheriting at least the physical attributes of King Richard.
- 85 *trick*: Distinctive characteristic, peculiarity.
- 86 *affecteth*: Resembles, takes after.
- 87 *read*: Discern. (The metaphor of a man as a book recurs at II.1.101–3 and 485.)
- tokens*: Features, traits.
- 88 *large composition*: (1) Powerful build or (2) general demeanour.
- 89 *parts*: Appearance (face and figure).
- 90 *perfect Richard*: The very image of Richard.
- Sirrah*: A form of address used to inferiors, with an undertone of contempt.
- 92–4, *Because he hath a half-face ... employed my mother*:
- 97–8 These two short speeches from the Bastard do not disturb the syntax of the surrounding dialogue: Robert Faulconbridge's statement at 95 is in direct response to the King's question at 91, and his speech beginning at 99 flows on directly from 96. It seems best, therefore, to regard the Bastard's comments as asides to the audience, the first indications of his developing relationship with them.
- 92 *half-face*: Profile (with the secondary meaning of 'thin face', 'whey-face').
- 93 *With half that face would he have all my land*: With a face like his – half a half-face, the profile of a profile – he expects to get all my land (with a pun on *face* as 'impudence', 'cheek').
- 94 *half-faced groat*: Thin silver coin of the value of 4 pence with the monarch's head in profile; with a pun on *half-faced* as 'clipped', 'imperfect'. The Bastard suggests that the thinness of his

half-brother's face makes him resemble the monarch's head on a coin.

98 *tail*: Possibly with a bawdy quibble on 'tail'.

employed: With a bawdy quibble.

100 *the Emperor*: The Holy Roman Emperor during most of Richard I's reign was Henry VI, who had in fact kept Richard in prison as he returned from Crusade. Holinshed records embassies being sent to him. But since Richard reigned only ten years and we are here only at the beginning of John's reign, the ages of Faulconbridge and his brother make it clear that the story cannot be historically based. It is a dramatic fiction, a part of the play's general looking-back to Richard's reign as a golden age when men were knighted in the field and serious discussions of *high affairs* took place between monarchs.

105–8 *Large lengths of seas ... gentleman was got*: The legal presumption of legitimacy of a child born in wedlock is, and was, very strong. Robert Faulconbridge's attempt to prove his father's absence at the time of conception is rendered useless in law by the fact that his father returned before the child's birth and apparently did not attempt to deny the child until the time of his own death. The Bastard does not even bother to answer Robert's case here.

108 *lusty*: Vigorous, merry (though doubtless with some reflection of the idea of 'lustfulness').

got: Conceived.

109–10 *he by will bequeathed* | *His lands to me*: English law during John's reign and for some time after did not allow land to be removed from the hereditary succession by will. Shakespeare's legal accuracy in dealing with the complex issues here is interesting. There is no mention of a will in *The Troublesome Reign*; its inclusion adds another element to the connections between this inheritance and the one over which John and Arthur are in dispute.

110 *took it on his death*: Swore most solemnly. (To swear falsely immediately before one's death would mean going to judgement in a state of sin.)

113 *Full fourteen weeks*: The time in *The Troublesome Reign* is only six weeks, and there Queen Eleanor argues that such a period of prematurity is not impossible. Shakespeare's deliberate increase makes quite clear to the audience on which side the truth lies, but does not alter the legal position.

- 115 *will*: (1) Wish or (2) testament.
- 116–17 *your brother ... wedlock bear him*: John's verdict is good law: none of Robert's arguments has legal force.
- 119 *lies on the hazards*: Is one of the risks.
- 123–7 *your father might have kept ... refuse him*: Again John enunciates traditional English law, with an allusion to the proverb 'whose the cow is, his is the calf'.
- 128–9 *My mother's son ... your father's land*: The tricky conclusion, though legally valid, admits the Bastard's illegitimacy ('My mother's son did get ...') while reinstating him in possession of his land. It comes interestingly from the man who holds his own position rather through *strong possession* than *right*.
- 130–31 *Shall then my father's will ... not his*: See [the note to 109–10](#); the Bastard gives the correct answer.
- 133 *will*: To the puns present at 115, the sense of *will* as 'sexual desire' is here added.
- 134 *Whether*: Which of the two.
- 135 *And like*: And appear to the world as, be rated as.
- 136 *reputed*: Acknowledged, recognized (with no implication of false or suspect reputation, as in modern usage).
- 137 *Lord of thy presence, and no land beside*: Sole master of yourself, and of your lordly bearing, but with no land to go with it. The phrase *Lord of thy presence* has overtones of regal dignity.
- 138 *an if*: If.
- 140–47 *And if my legs ... Sir Nob in any case*: To the Bastard's exuberance and variety of allusion Shakespeare here adds a series of words all carrying a bawdy second meaning in Elizabethan English. None of these seems to have any syntactic significance in the sentence, but the accumulation of such words can scarcely be coincidence. They allow the Bastard and the audience to share jokes of which the courtiers to whom the words are addressed are unaware. The words *rods*, *eel-skins* and *Nob* ('knob') were all used for the male organ; *rose*, *shape* (cf. *Timon of Athens*, II.2.115) and *case* for the female organ; *riding*, *stuffed* and *foot* (from the French '*foutre*') for copulation; and *stir* for the arousing of sexual desire.
- 140 *riding-rods*: Thin switches, canes, used in riding.
- 141 *eel-skins stuffed*: Symbolizing thinness and lack of strength.
- 142–3 *in mine ear ... three-farthings goes*: I should be afraid to wear a rose behind my ear for fear of being taken for (or mockingly compared to) a three-farthing piece. The three-farthing coin was distinguished from others of similar size but different value by the

addition of a rose behind the head of Queen Elizabeth. The Bastard repeats, more exuberantly, the joke of 94.

144 *to*: In addition to.

all this land: The land in dispute, but also, quibblingly, England. Behind the Bastard's flippant suggestion that not even the whole realm would compensate him for having to look like his brother lies the more serious idea of Richard's inheritance and the Bastard's role in its settlement.

145 *Would I might never stir from off this place*: May I be struck dead this minute (if I tell a lie).

146–7 *I would give it every foot ... in any case*: I would renounce every foot of the land in order to keep my own appearance; under no circumstances would I agree to look like Sir Robert. The closing triplet reflects the Bastard's tone of flippant, but reckless, finality.

147 *Sir Nob*: Familiar form of Sir Robert, with a bawdy quibble and a pun on *Nob* ('knob') as head (of the family).

148–50 *Wilt thou forsake ... bound to France*: It is from Queen Eleanor that the Bastard receives his invitation to join the royal service; he follows her, and the significant period of his service directly to John comes after the report of her death at IV.2.120–21. In III.2.7–8 we learn that he has rescued Queen Eleanor from a dangerous battle situation.

149 *Bequeath*: Resign, give up (immediately, not by will).

150 *I am a soldier*: Queen Eleanor's direct involvement in military affairs is clear at III.2.6–7, III.3.69–70 and IV.2.116–19.

153 *fivepence*: An increase on previous valuations – see 94 and 143 – explaining, perhaps, why he thinks it *dear*.

155–6 *Nay, I would have you go before ... our betters way*: The Bastard's royal blood may perhaps be thought of as revealing itself in the courtly ease with which he jokes with the Queen Mother.

158 *so is my name begun*: The Bastard gives only his Christian name, his surname being in doubt.

159 *Philip, good old Sir Robert's wife's eldest son*: The line deliberately has too many syllables: the word *wife's* ought to be superfluous, and its presence upsets the metre with comic effect.

160–62 *From henceforth ... Sir Richard, and Plantagenet*: The Bastard's new knightly title is used only twice in *King John* – by Salisbury at IV.3.41 as he seeks to enlist his support, and by the Bastard himself for comic effect (I.1.185). He is called Richard at

I.1.168 and 178 and V.3.12 and mocks the name Philip at I.1.231. At III.2.4, however, he calls himself Philip, and John repeats the name in the following line – though those instances may possibly reflect Shakespeare's own confusion. Others in the play seem to be unaffected by the renaming ceremony here: the Bastard is called simply Faulconbridge at III.4.171, IV.3.94 and 101, V.3.5 and V.4.4.

160 *his*: Richard Coeur-de-lion's.

165 *hour*: A pun on 'whore' (probably similarly pronounced in Elizabethan English) may be intended.

168 *grandam*: A familiar form of 'grandmother'.

169–75 *Madam, by chance ... I was begot*: The string of proverbial expressions here, emphasized by the rhyme-scheme and suggestive of the Bastard's *country manners* (156), again conceals a series of bawdy quibbles to be shared with the audience. The proverbs alternate amusingly between real proverbial sayings and maxims apparently invented by the Bastard on the spur of the moment; the vigorous self-assertion of the final line, reinforced by the couplet, sets the rest in perspective.

169 *by chance but not by truth; what though*: It is by chance (that you are my grandmother) and not through marital faithfulness (*truth*); but what of that?

170 *Something about, a little from the right*: By a roundabout, or indirect, route (with sexual overtones); *from the right* suggests the 'bar sinister' of illegitimacy.

171 *In at the window, or else o'er the hatch*: Proverbial expressions suggestive of the illicit entry resulting in bastardy.

172 *Who dares not stir by day must walk by night*: The Bastard is here (and in 174) imitating rather than quoting a proverb. The line conceals quibbles on *stir* (to arouse sexually), and on 'night-walker' (a colloquialism for thief, in this instance one who takes what belongs sexually to another).

173 *have is have, however men do catch*: However it is obtained, possession is what counts.

174 *Near or far off, well won is still well shot*: The allusion seems to be to an archery contest: the winner will be thought a good shot whether he has been close to, or far from, the target (with sexual quibbles on *won* and *shot*).

177 *A landless knight makes thee a landed squire*: The Bastard, just knighted, has given Robert Faulconbridge undisputed possession of old Sir Robert's lands by admitting his bastardy and following

the Queen.

- 180–81 *Good fortune come ... i'th'way of honesty*: May you, conceived in wedlock, enjoy good fortune (alluding to the proverb 'Bastards are born lucky', the Bastard implying that his own good fortune is thus assured).
- 182–216 *A foot of honour ... the footsteps of my rising*: The soliloquy follows a pattern similar to that of 169–75, progressing through a rapid exploration of several facets of an idea to conclude with a vigorous statement of determined self-assertion.
- 182–3 *foot of honour ... foot of land*: The Bastard puns on *foot* in the vague sense of 'a step', 'a degree' (of honour, of social advancement), and *foot* as a concrete measure of actual land owned.
- 183 *many a many*: The colloquial form *a many* often appears where we would use 'many a'.
- 184 *make any Joan a lady*: The Bastard's new title of 'Sir Richard' means that his wife would automatically be called 'Lady'. *Joan* was a familiar name for any ordinary girl, though it was also a colloquialism for a whore. The remark thus attacks social pretension and unreal respectability.
- 185 *Good den*: A frequent colloquial greeting, contracted from 'God give you good evening'.
God 'a' mercy: A somewhat patronizing greeting from a superior to his inferior, contracted from 'God have mercy on you'.
fellow: Another patronizing form of address.
- 187–9 *new-made honour ... For your conversion*: Those newly raised in social status choose not to remember other people's names; to do so would betray too much considerateness and sociability in one thus changed in status.
- 189 *your conversion*: Your newly honoured (converted) person (that is, himself). The colloquial use of *your* (to mean 'that which you know of') continues the tone of familiarity which the Bastard is establishing with the audience.
- 189–204 *Now your traveller ... in conclusion so*: The syntax here is disorganized partly because the Bastard, warming to his task of exposing social pretensions, jumps excitedly from one idea to the next, and partly because he is deliberately satirizing the directionless vacuity of polite conversation.
- 189 *traveller*: Travellers carried news and were thus, presumably, popular as guests. As the following lines make clear, travellers would also bring with them the new fashions and affectations.

- 190 *toothpick*: One of the affected, 'foreign' fashions for which travellers were noted.
at my worship's mess: At my table, or at that part of the table where I, as a knight, will be placed. 'Your worship' was the usual form of address to a knight.
- 192 *suck my teeth*: He imagines himself taking all the time he needs to finish his meal before he deigns to open the conversation. He will then use a defiantly English method of cleaning his teeth.
catechize: Ask questions of.
- 193 *pickèd*: Affected, foppish (with a quibble on the fact that his teeth are newly picked).
man of countries: The traveller. There is a sharp tone of mockery in the epithet, suggesting that affecting to be *of countries* is considerably inferior to being a straightforward Englishman.
- 194 *leaning on mine elbow*: In nonchalant command of the social situation.
- 195 *that is question now*: As yet, no *question* has been asked. The Bastard mocks the absurdities of polite conversation.
question: For the next five lines the knight/host and traveller/guest are, in the Bastard's imagination, depersonalized in exaggerated courtesy into *question* and *answer*.
- 196 *like an Absey book*: Automatically, pat. An *Absey* [ABC] *book* is a child's primer, providing set answers to set questions.
- 200 *would*: Intends, wishes to convey.
- 201 *Saving*: Except.
dialogue of compliment: Flatteringly meaningless conversation.
- 202–3 *the Alps and Apennines*, | *The Pyrenean and the River Po*: Presumably places the traveller has been to – though obviously chosen principally for their alliteration.
- 204 *toward supper*: The whole time between dinner (taken between eleven a.m. and midday in Elizabethan England) and supper (taken between about five and seven p.m.) has been wasted in empty formalities.
- 206 *fits the mounting spirit like myself*: Is congenial to an ambitious person such as I am. The soliloquy grows more complicated from this point as the Bastard remains poised between contempt and his plan to conform for the sake of self-interest – a plan which the play shows him rising beyond.
- 207–8 *he is but a bastard ... smack of observation*: The man who has no taint of courtliness is utterly out of tune with the time. The

Bastard suggests that the man who does not *smack* (show the characteristics, savour) of *observation* (obsequiousness, observing the inclinations of others) is not a legitimate child of the age, is an unnatural phenomenon.

- 209–13 *And so am I ... sweet poison for the age's tooth*: The sense runs on from the Bastard's expression of intention (*am I*) to the clarification of that intention at *to deliver*. The passage might be paraphrased as follows: 'And therefore, whether or not I'm the true child of the age, I intend to flatter its values and susceptibilities, and this not only in outward forms but with inner conviction.'
- 209 *whether I smack or no*: Whether or not I genuinely have the quality (of obsequiousness).
- 210 *habit and device*: Clothes, outward appearance. *device* probably also carries the meaning of armorial device, or coat of arms.
- 211 *outward accoutrement*: The face he will present to the world, with overtones of knightly or armorial 'accoutrements'.
- 212 *the inward motion*: My own inner desire or inclination.
- 213 *sweet poison for the age's tooth*: Flattery, exploitation of the standards of the age.
- 214–16 *Which ... shall strew the footsteps of my rising*: Which (the flattery he intends to deliver), though I will not deliberately plan to deceive people – yet I am determined that they will not deceive me – I shall use to make easy the progress of my advancement.
- 214 *practise*: Plan, plot.
- 215 *deceit*: Being deceived myself.
- 216 *it shall strew the footsteps of my rising*: The flattery I give to others will facilitate every step of my rise to eminence. The allusion is to the custom of placing straw on the floor to prevent its being slippery.
- 218 *woman-post*: Female dispatch-rider (an impossibility, the office being always performed by men).
- 219 *take pains to blow a horn before her*: The ostensible allusion is to the post-horn giving warning of the rider's approach, but this thinly veils a quibble on the horn as the symbol of cuckoldry. There may possibly also be a bawdy quibble on *horn* as the male organ, particularly since it is here used with *take pains*, which has a specifically sexual sense at 78 above.
- Lady Faulconbridge*: Shakespeare brings in the Bastard's mother much later than *The Troublesome Reign*. She appears here simply

to confirm the circumstances of her son's birth.

James Gurney: The F stage direction, and the Bastard at 230, both identify Lady Faulconbridge's follower (the only character in the play with no original in *The Troublesome Reign*) with apparently unnecessary precision.

220 *'tis*: The abbreviation upsets the scansion and some editors expand to 'it is'. But the irregularity of metre may be appropriate to the Bastard's surprise at the appearance of his mother, or the slight affectation of *'tis* may be another little piece of facetiousness shared with the audience in mockery of his mother's anxiety to preserve her respectability.

good lady: The courtesy of the Bastard in his interview with his mother contrasts with *The Troublesome Reign*, where he threatens to behave as Nero did to his mother in order to secure the information he wants.

223 *holds in chase mine honour*: Hunts after my honour (as Sir Robert's wife), seeking to destroy it (by attempting to prove that she was unfaithful to her husband).

225 *Colbrand the Giant*: A Danish giant killed by Guy of Warwick in the popular old romances.

228 *Why scornest thou*: The 'scorn' must be conveyed in the actor's pronunciation of the name *Sir Robert*, for the Bastard's words suggest scorn for his half-brother rather than for the latter's father. But by the constant repetition of Sir Robert's name, attention, if not scorn, is focused on the long-maintained fiction of his having fathered the Bastard.

230 *give us leave*: Leave us. The Bastard is not prepared to discuss his mother's honour in public. In this he contrasts with his half-brother, who holds it *in chase*.

231 *Good leave*: Willingly, with pleasure.

Philip: James Gurney uses a familiar mode of address to the young man he still assumes to be Sir Robert's heir; he seems more of a friend than a servant.

Philip? – Sparrow: The Bastard pretends shock at the humble name. He is now *Sir Richard, and Plantagenet*. Philip was a name often given to sparrows (cf. Robin-redbreast, Jack-daw, etc.).

232 *There's toys abroad*: A few trifling things have happened (flippantly understated).

Anon: Soon.

234–5 *Sir Robert might have eat ... ne'er broke his fast*: Sir Robert's contribution to my conception was nil. The Bastard again uses a

proverb to make a point more vividly. Good Friday was the most strict of religious fast-days.

234 *eat*: Eaten.

236–7 *Sir Robert could do well – marry, to confess – | Could he get me*: The broken syntax perhaps reflects the Bastard's sense of awkwardness in putting to his mother a suggestion which implicitly (throughout his life) and explicitly (recently) she has vigorously denied.

236 *Sir Robert could do well*: The sentence changes direction at a point which permits a bawdy quibble on *do*.

marry, to confess: Well, indeed, to be honest.

239 *beholding*: Indebted.

240 *holp*: Helped.

make this leg: To 'make a leg' was to bow: the Bastard may bow facetiously to his mother as he requests an answer.

242 *for thine own gain shouldst defend mine honour*: Because to prove her dishonour will disinherit him – as the Bastard himself has said at 68–70.

243 *untoward*: Unmannerly.

243–4 *knave?* | *Knight, knight, good mother, Basilisco-like*: The Bastard's self-mocking reference is to the *knight / knave* joke in the anonymous play *Solyman and Perseda* (c. 1591–2):

BASILISCO

I, the aforesaid Basilisco – knight, good fellow,
Knight, knight –

PISTON

Knave, good fellow, knave, knave. (I.3.170–72)

245 *I am dubbed, I have it on my shoulder*: The Bastard recalls the ceremony of knighting which we witnessed at 161–2, and simultaneously makes fun of the fashionable expression *I have it*, meaning 'I have been mortally wounded'.

248 *Legitimation, name, and all is gone*: The Bastard makes clear his far-reaching decision at 138–47 and 151–4. An actor might well suggest his realization of this at the words *all is gone*.

250 *Some proper man*: The Bastard's apparent ignorance of his father after all that has gone before permits his mother's unequivocal statement at 253.

proper: Handsome, well-made.

252 *As faithfully as I deny the devil*: Echoing the service of baptism, and the catechism: 'renounce the devil and all his works'.

- 253 *King Richard Coeur-de-lion was thy father*: The simplicity and directness of this are important. The Bastard's physical appearance and Queen Eleanor's intuition are now confirmed by Lady Faulconbridge's direct statement.
- 256–7 *Heaven lay not ... the issue of my dear offence*: F prints these lines as: *Heauen lay not my transgression to my charge, | That art the issue of my deere offence ...* Most editors emend, either to '... to thy charge | That art ...' or to '... to my charge! | Thou art ...'. The former introduces an element of affection otherwise absent from Lady Faulconbridge's lines. The second emendation is preferable, though Lady Faulconbridge's wish (256) that she should not be accused of a sin that she admits is somewhat obscure; this must mean 'may heaven not bring this sin forward against me when I come to *eternal* judgement', the *charge* having already been confessed on earth as a *transgression*.
- 257 *dear offence*: (1) Transgression which (because of the stain on her honour, or on her soul) has cost me dear *or* (2) transgression which has been deeply felt – and also, perhaps, of which the memory is still precious (because of the feeling she had for King Richard).
- 258 *past my defence*: Past my ability to say no (with a sexual quibble on 'offence'/'defence').
- 259 *by this light*: A frequent, mild oath.
- 261 *Some sins do bear their privilege on earth*: Some sins are privileged with immunity from earthly punishment. The slightly dubious theology of this (it is heavenly, not earthly, retribution that Lady Faulconbridge was worried about at 256) is less important than the Bastard's amusing anxiety to provide his mother with every excuse for having given him the father he wants.
- 262 *Your fault was not your folly*: Though you did commit a fault it was far from foolish (to accept the love of King Richard).
- 263–7 *Needs must you lay your heart ... his princely heart from Richard's hand*: You had no choice but to give your heart to King Richard, offering a subject's obedience to a monarch's inalienable demand for love, just as the fearless lion was powerless to protect its heart from the rage and strength of Richard's hand.
- 264 *Subjected tribute*: The phrase puns on the fact that Lady Faulconbridge is politically King Richard's 'subject', and on the Prayer Book injunction that wives should be 'subject' to their husbands – given a facetious twist here by the fact that she

subjects herself to the usurper of her husband's position. There is also a sexual image behind the line.

268 *perforce*: By physical strength.

270 *my heart*: The Bastard, pleased with his figure linking his mother's heart and the lion's, now adds his own.

271 *didst*: With a bawdy quibble.

272 *I'll send his soul to hell*: By killing him at once, while the lie (that his mother did not do well in accepting King Richard's love) is still on his lips, so that he dies in sin.

273 *my kin*: Queen Eleanor and King John.

275 *If thou hadst said him nay, it had been sin*: The Bastard now takes his rather dubious theology even further: not only did his mother *not sin* in accepting King Richard's love; if she had denied him, that would have been sinful in itself.

276 *Who says it was, he lies*: The man who suggests that your behaviour was a sin is a liar.

I say 'twas not: The Bastard leaves the stage in high spirits, and with a typically bawdy pun to end on: *not* suggests 'nought' (nothing), and thence 'naught', 'naughtiness' (a sexual transgression).

II.1

F heads this scene '*Scæna Secunda*', but editors have traditionally begun a new act here (see [An Account of the Text](#), pp. 106–7). The scene takes place, as the first line makes clear, before Angiers, the capital of the province of Anjou and thus also the capital of the Angevin Empire which John had inherited from his brother and father. The material is again from *The Troublesome Reign*. Shakespeare departs from his source in keeping Arthur uncontaminated by involvement in the sordid wrangling into which the scene often descends and in which he joins in *The Troublesome Reign*. He also differs from the anonymous play in omitting the connection between the Bastard and Blanche (see [the note to 141–2](#)), and in ending the scene with the Bastard's devastating summing-up.

The scene follows closely upon the preceding one: there are several references to John's speed in reaching France, and Chatillon has come from England as soon as *adverse winds* (57) would allow. The events depicted come (via *The Troublesome Reign*) mainly from Holinshed's account of the year 1200. The peace with which the scene ends is known to historians as the

Treaty of Le Goulet. The terms which John agrees to at 527–30 (and also in *The Troublesome Reign*) are a gross exaggeration of what John conceded at Le Goulet, though they do reflect what Arthur and his French allies claimed. The marriage to which the end of the scene looks forward in fact took place in 1202, two years after the betrothal which ratified the treaty.

The scene requires, from line 200 onwards, the use of an upper stage representing the walls of Angiers. The contestants should appear in balanced groups. The two Kings presumably wear their crowns (John certainly does so – see 273). Their supporters will appear grouped beside them, the pompous rhetoric of one side constantly matched by that of the other, and interrupted with brilliant effect by the deflating asides (and concluding soliloquy) of the Bastard and by the vicious shouting matches which occur when the subordinate figures take over, exposing the underlying sordidness of political greed.

- 0 *King Philip of France*: See [the note to I.1.1](#) for his historical identity. F's speech-prefixes normally refer to him as *Fra.* or *Fran.* (that is, King of France), thus making it clear that it is his function as ruler of the enemy, not his individual identity, that is significant.

Lewis the Dauphin: The son of King Philip II. Born in 1187, he was married in 1202 to Blanche of Castile, succeeded his father in 1223 (as Louis VIII), and died in 1226. Historically he was only thirteen at the time of the events depicted in this scene. The title 'Dauphin' is an anachronism, having come to the French royal family in 1349, after which it was borne by the eldest son of the French King. Shakespeare follows *The Troublesome Reign* in using it. The anachronism indicates that it is the Dauphin's position as second-in-command of the enemy party, not his historical individuality, that is important. F normally uses the anglicized form *Dolphin*, indicating the familiarity of the title to Shakespeare's audience. The metre requires only the lightest accentuation of the second syllable of the name Lewis.

Archduke of Austria: Shakespeare has followed *The Troublesome Reign* in treating as one character two of Richard I's enemies, Leopold Archduke of Austria, and Vidomar Viscount of Limoges. That he regarded them as the same person is made clear at III.1.114. Richard had been imprisoned by Leopold of Austria as he returned from Crusade in 1192. Richard's taking of the lion's heart (see [the note to I.1.54](#)) was supposed to have occurred

during his imprisonment. Leopold died in 1195, four years before Richard himself was killed while besieging a castle of the Viscount of Limoges in France. Holinshed reports the death of Limoges at the hands of Richard's bastard son in the first year of John's reign (see [note on the Bastard, I.1.49](#)). Austria enters here wearing King Richard's lion-skin, and the Bastard alludes to it in his first speech (135–40). In adapting *The Troublesome Reign* Shakespeare has omitted specifically to point out that Austria's lion-skin was taken from King Richard, and directors have sometimes added the Bastard's aside from the source play before his taunt at 134: 'My father's foe clad in my father's spoil' (I.557). But we are reminded of the story of Richard and the lion close on each side of Austria's appearance (I.1.265–8, II.1.3) and an actor could easily make the point clear by drawing attention to the lion-skin at the second of these references.

- 1–11, 18 *Before Angiers ... do thee right*: F gives these lines to Lewis, but their authoritative tone makes it almost certain that the French King, rather than the Dauphin, is intended (see [An Account of the Text, p. 105](#)).
- 1 *Angiers*: The modern form is 'Angers', but the anglicized form is standard throughout the play and its sources, and an anglicized pronunciation also seems appropriate. The town is some 200 miles south-west of Paris.
well met: The scene represents the first meeting of the allies and the joining up of their forces for the siege.
- 2 *forerunner of thy blood*: Here and at 6 and 13 (*posterity, offspring*) the degree of kinship between Arthur and King Richard is exaggerated. Arthur was Richard's nephew, the son of his younger (John's elder) brother, Geoffrey, not a blood descendant of Coeur-de-lion. Shakespeare apparently deliberately exaggerates Arthur's claim to John's throne, while showing his weakness forcing him into alliance with England's enemies. John, on the other hand, is ruling with sturdy independence, even though his own mother has admitted his usurpation. The problem of political morality thus created is at the heart of the play. (See also [99–109](#) (especially [105](#)) and [177](#).)
- 3 *robbed the lion of his heart*: see [note to I.1.54](#).
- 4 *fought the holy wars in Palestine*: Richard had been one of the leaders of the Third Crusade in 1190–92.
- 7 *importance*: Urgent request, importunity.
- 8 *spread his colours*: Spread his flags, battle ensigns, as an

indication of his intention to fight.

- 9 *rebuke*: Repress, put down. (The word implies physical force, not the verbal reproach of modern usage.)

usurpation: Five syllables.

- 10 *unnatural*: The French charge is that John's usurpation has upset the 'natural' order of succession; the word also suggests cruelty, failure to treat a nephew with the kindness naturally expected in an uncle.
- 11 *Embrace him*: Our first view of the aspirant to the throne King John occupies is of his embracing in alliance the man just identified as the killer of England's last, *honour-giving*, king.
- 14 *Shadowing*: Sheltering, giving protection to.
their: Probably referring to King Richard's *offspring* (in whatever sense) in general, though, since Arthur claims to be Richard's sole heir, Constance and Arthur together may be intended.
- 15 *powerless*: Because the lands he claims are kept from him.
- 16 *unstained*: Unmitigated, unaffected (presumably by memories of Austria's killing King Richard).
- 18 *do thee right*: Support your cause (in seeking the English crown).
- 19 *zealous*: *zeal* and *zealous* are used by, or applied to, the French party several times in the scene (244, 428, 477 and 565). Their implication of fervent commitment contrasts with the calculating coolness of the French King (revealed, for example, in 53, 265–6 and 479) to produce a strong suggestion of hypocrisy. Since the only other occurrences of *zeal* (III.4.150 and V.2.10) refer to the changing of political allegiance, the word consistently suggests exaggerated fervour masking self-interest.
- 20 *seal to this indenture of my love*: Austria imagines that the promises he is about to enumerate form the contents of an *indenture*, or sealed document, committing him to support of Arthur and bearing witness to his *love*. The *seal* on this document is the *zealous kiss* he here ostentatiously gives. (There is probably a quibble on *seal* and *zealous*.)
- 22 *the right thou hast in France*: The provinces claimed by the French envoy in I.1.11.

23–30 *that pale, that white-faced shore ... Salute thee for her king*: The speech develops further in the direction of patriotic description of England than seems quite appropriate from one of England's enemies. There is no equivalent for it in *The Troublesome Reign*. Many of its ideas were used by Shakespeare in

John of Gaunt's famous lines in *Richard II* (II.1.40–68).

- 23 *that pale, that white-faced shore*: The white chalk cliffs of the Channel coast of England that look towards France. There is also a quibble on *pale* as an enclosed territory, linking with *water-walled* at 27.
- 25 *coops*: Binds in (for protection).
- 26 *main*: Ocean.
- 27–8 *still secure* | *And confident from foreign purposes*: Always safe from the hostile plots of other nations (in particular, invasion), and confident of remaining so.
- 29 *utmost corner of the west*: The image seems to be based on the idea of Europe as the whole of the 'known world', with Britain at the top left, rather than on what Shakespeare refers to in *Twelfth Night* as 'the new map with the augmentation of the Indies' (III.2.75–6).
- 30 *Salute*: Welcome, receive.
- 32 *widow's*: See [the second note to I.1.32](#).
- 34 *a more requital to your love*: A greater (and more material) demonstration of gratitude for your friendship. Constance implies that Austria will be rewarded for his aid when he has helped to win the means of reward.
- 35 *The peace of heaven is theirs*: The unctuousness of Austria's self-congratulation is accentuated by its vague echo of the Sermon on the Mount.
- 37–8 *Our cannon shall be bent* | *Against the brows*: Our guns will be directed at the walls. *bent*, originally used of the bow, was applied to the aiming of other weapons. The use of *brows* for 'walls' begins a series of personifications of the town (see [208](#), [215](#), [225](#), [259](#) and [404](#)).
- 37 *cannon*: see [note to I.1.26](#).
- 39 *chiefest men of discipline*: Men most able in (or in charge of) military affairs (here particularly siege warfare).
- 40 *cull the plots of best advantages*: Choose the most advantageous positions (for the cannon).
- 41 *lay before this town our royal bones*: Die here (if that is necessary in order to win Arthur's rights).
- 44 *embassy*: That of Chatillon, dealt with in I.1.1–30.
- 45 *unadvised*: Unadvisedly, without adequate deliberation.
- 46–7 *bring* | *That right in peace*: Bring an admission of our rightful claim (Arthur's to the English Crown) without our needing to resort to battle.

- 49 *indirectly*: Wrongfully, causelessly (without reason or direction).
- 52, 56 *England*: The King of England.
- 53 *coldly*: Calmly, restraining the rage we were about to vent. The word comes oddly after the reference to *hot rash haste* (49), suggesting the hypocrisy which governs the profession of feelings that can be turned off and on at will.
- 55 *mightier task*: A confrontation with the English King and army.
- 56 *impatient of your just demands*: Showing no patience with what you justifiably demanded of him.
- 57 *adverse winds*: Shakespeare departs here from Chatillon's unlikely account in *The Troublesome Reign* of John and himself crossing to France in the same ship (I.471).
- 58 *leisure I have stayed*: Convenience I have had to wait upon.
- 59 *all*: Quite.
- 60 *expedient*: Speedy. John's speed is emphasized throughout the scene (see [note to I.1.25](#)).
- 62 *Mother-Queen*: Queen Mother (Queen Eleanor).
- 63 *Ate*: Two syllables; Greek goddess of mischief and vengeance.
- 64 *her niece, the Lady Blanche of Spain*: Blanche of Castile, born in 1185, was the granddaughter (*niece* is here used in its older, more general sense) of Eleanor of Aquitaine, being the child of Alfonso, King of Castile, and of Eleanor, the daughter of Henry II and Queen Eleanor. She was thus King John's 'niece' in the modern sense. (See [the Genealogical Table](#).) She married the future Louis VIII of France in 1202 and died in 1254.
- 65 *of the King's deceased*: Of the deceased King (Richard Coeur-de-lion). The line is one of the play's precise verbal echoes of *The Troublesome Reign* (I.490).
- 66–75 *And all th'unsettled humours ... in Christendom*: Chatillon's description begins in contempt, but shifts into a tone of admiration recalling the descriptions of the English forces in the second and third choruses of *Henry V*.
- 66 *unsettled humours*: Discontented, feckless men.
- 67 *inconsiderate*: Not considering themselves or others, careless.
voluntaries: Volunteers.
- 68 *ladies' faces*: Because they are too young to have grown beards.
fierce dragons' spleens: Dragon-like ferocity. The spleen was thought to be the seat of the passions.
- 69–71 *Have sold their fortunes ... a hazard of new fortunes here*:
Have converted their inheritances and possessions in England into

armour which they are now wearing proudly on this expedition to France, taking the chance of gaining new (larger) fortunes here.

72 *spirits*: One syllable: 'sprites'.

73 *bottoms*: Ships.

waft: Wafted, brought.

75 *scathe*: Harm.

76 *churlish*: Uncouth (both in themselves, because they are English, and for interrupting him).

77 *Cuts off more circumstance*: Leaves no time for further details.

79 *expedition*: The word has its concrete sense of 'military force' but also, and more importantly, its abstract meaning of 'speed'.

80–81 *By how much unexpected ... awake endeavour for defence*: Our speed in organizing our defences must match the speed with which the enemy has arrived.

82 *with occasion*: With the emergency that necessitates it.

83 *lords, and soldiers*: The F stage direction specifies *Pembroke, and others*. There are no lines for Pembroke in the scene, though he, and other peers, including Salisbury (see [note to 554](#)), might appropriately be present as commanders of the English army.

84–8 *Peace be to France ... peace to heaven*: King John's opening statement sets the tone for the balanced political rhetoric of much of the rest of the scene.

84–5 *permit* | *Our just and lineal entrance to our own*: Allows us to enter and take possession of the town (Angiers) which is ours by right of descent.

86 *bleed France*: Let (may) France bleed.

87 *Whiles*: The old genitive form of 'while'.

God's wrathful agent: An allusion to the divine right of kings. Both sides claim the alliance of heaven in the present conflict.

correct: Punish.

88 *Their proud contempt that beats His peace to heaven*: The pride and defiance which those who drive divine peace from the earth show towards God.

beats: Singular verb after plural subject, influenced by the interposition of *contempt*.

91 *England we love*: The joke is a common one. Cf. *Henry V*, V.2.172–3: 'I love France so well that I will not part with a village of it ...'

England's: Both the country's and its king's – that is, Arthur's. The quibble reinforces the statement of Arthur's rights.

93–109 *This toil of ours ... the crown that thou o'ermasterest*:

Shakespeare allows a powerful statement of Arthur's rights. It is part of his dramatic purpose that he should do so, and as at 2 above he strains historical fact in the process.

93 *should be a work of thine*: Is your duty.

95 *underwrought his lawful king*: Undermined the power of England's lawful king (Arthur).

his: Its.

96 *Cut off the sequence of posterity*: Broken the lineal order of succession. Cf. 6 above, and see [note to 2](#).

97 *Outfacèd infant state*: Defied a child's right to the throne.

99 *thy brother Geoffrey's face*: As mirrored in his son's.

100 *were moulded out of*: Are patterned, shaped, in likeness of.

101–3 *This little abstract ... as huge a volume*: Cf. I.1.87 for this rather artificial figure.

101 *This little abstract doth contain that large*: Here (in Arthur) is a precise epitome of the grown man (his father Geoffrey).

102–3 *the hand of time ... as huge a volume*: The years will see Arthur grow into a man as mighty as his father.

105 *England was Geoffrey's right*: Here again (cf. 2) there seems to be some distortion of history in order to emphasize the validity of Arthur's claim; England was never in fact *Geoffrey's right* since he died before his father and elder brother.

106 *this is Geoffrey's*: This boy is Geoffrey's son (perhaps pointing to him, or raising his arm). Though the exact extent of *Geoffrey's right* is vague in the speech, it seems likely that King Philip here refers to Arthur (rather than to John's crown, or the city of Angiers, or anything else that Arthur might claim through his father). The pathetic child, thus observed and pointed to, acts as a silent but powerful comment on the political wrangling.

In the name of God: The solemn prelude to the questioning of John is in accordance with the usual opening of Elizabethan wills.

109 *owe*: Own, have lawful claim to.

o'ermasterest: Possess by force, usurp.

110–11 *From whom ... my answer from thy articles*: From where do you, the King of France, claim the right to demand of me (as King of England) a reply to the various items of your accusation?

112–17 *From that supernal judge ... I mean to chastise it*: It is the French King's turn to claim divine sanction (cf. 87 above).

112 *supernal*: Heavenly.

113–14 *In any breast of strong authority ... stains of right*: The lines are a little strained and the text is doubtful. (F reads *beast* for

breast; the emendation to *breast* was first made in the second Folio.) The general meaning, however, is clear enough: King Philip claims that God is the source of his *commission*, as of that of everyone in power, to look after the interests of truth and justice.

116 *impeach*: Challenge, accuse.

119 *Excuse it is to beat usurping down*: This is elliptical but clearly means. 'The excuse for it (my usurpation of authority) is that I am acting against usurpation (John's, of the English crown).'

120–50 *Who is it thou dost call usurper ... Women and fools, break off your conference*: With the passing of the dispute from the monarchs to the mothers of the claimants, and thence to the general bystanders, any vestige of political dignity is removed. In the equivalent episode in *The Troublesome Reign* Arthur is much involved. Shakespeare maintains the child's pathos by leaving him silent.

122 *Out*: Away, begone.

bastard: There is in the play no other reference to the possibility of Arthur's bastardy, and neither *The Troublesome Reign* nor Holinshed mentions it. Illegitimacy would, of course, immediately invalidate Arthur's claim, which Queen Eleanor herself accepts, in calmer mood, at I.1.40–41.

123 *be a queen and check the world*: (With an allusion to chess) Eleanor expands on her earlier accusation (I.1.32–4).

125 *As thine was to thy husband*: Constance counters Queen Eleanor's accusation by flinging it back at her (probably only as general abuse, but possibly with reference to the report given by some Tudor chroniclers of Eleanor's liaison with a Saracen while accompanying her first husband on Crusade in 1150; she had married the future Henry II two years later).

127 *manners*: Behaviour, conduct (that is, evil conduct).

128 *devil to his dam*: Many proverbial expressions of the period supply Satan with a mother.

130 *His father never was so true begot*: Constance, in her anger, makes one accusation too many: Geoffrey's illegitimacy would, of course, remove at a stroke Arthur's claim to the English throne. Shakespeare deliberately allows the sordidness of the wrangle to approach absurdity.

132 *blots thy father*: Stains your father's reputation, calumniates him.

134 *crier*: Officer in a law court who makes announcements, calls for order, etc.

- 135 *play the devil*: The Bastard's witty irreverence for those around him, his stirring and goading of them, and his amusing relationship with the audience, link him in some ways with the Vice figure in the medieval Morality plays. Later in the play, however, references to him as a devil imply his spritely, or even uncanny, invincibility (IV.3.95 and 100; V.4.4).
- 136 'a: He.
your hide: The lion-skin, taken from Coeur-de-lion, which Austria wears. It acts as a magnet to the Bastard's hatred for Austria here and throughout this and the following scene.
- 137–8 *the hare ... plucks dead lions by the beard*: The proverb 'Hares may pull dead lions by the beard' seems to have been widely used. The hare, from its alacrity in running away, was a symbol of cowardice. To pluck a man by the beard was an insult compelling a challenge.
- 139 *smoke*: Another of the Bastard's colloquialisms, meaning 'beat' or 'thrash'.
skin-coat: The Bastard punningly threatens Austria's own skin as well as the lion-skin.
- 140 *Sirrah*: A calculated insult; see [note to I.1.90](#).
- 141–2 *O, well did he become ... that robe*: Blanche's intervention with the Bastard against Austria derives from *The Troublesome Reign* (I.552–3), but is motivated there by an attachment between her and the Bastard. Shakespeare's removal of this motive allows Blanche's antipathy to Austria to be more objective. (See [also 290–93, 504–9](#) and [notes](#).)
- 143 *sightly*: Appropriately, handsomely.
- 144 *As great Alcides' shows upon an ass*: As the lion-skin robe of great Hercules (Alcides) would appear on an ass's back. F reads *Alcides shooes*, and 'shoes' has been defended by some editors since expressions involving the shoes of Hercules (as a symbol of great size) were fairly common in the sixteenth century. But to bring in 'shoes' (implying the ass's hooves) when it is Austria's (and the ass's) *back* that is in question in both the preceding and following lines seems to be adding an unnecessarily intrusive element. An allusion to Hercules in the context of a lion-skin must also have some reference to his wearing of the skin of the Nemean lion. Aesop's fable of the ass wearing the lion's skin, giving rise to the proverbial expression 'an ass in a lion's skin' (very appropriate to the Bastard's intention and certainly implied in his following line), must also be involved.

- 146 *lay on that shall*: Give you a beating that will.
crack: The rhyme, *back/crack*, intensifies the sharpness of the Bastard's insulting jibe.
- 147 *cracker*: Boaster (with a quibble on *crack* at 146).
- 149 *King Philip, determine*: F reads *King Lewis, determine* (which is clearly impossible) and assigns the next speech to *Lew*. Some editors read 'King, – Lewis, determine,' suggesting that, in his bewilderment, Austria turns for aid both to the King and to the Dauphin. This is plausible, but the error is so like that at the beginning of the scene (1–11 and 18) that the simple substitution of *Philip* for *Lewis* seems the safest emendation.
straight: Immediately.
- 150 *conference*: The word is apparently ironically used of the wrangle we have just witnessed.
- 152 *England and Ireland, Anjou, Touraine, Maine*: The list reproduces Chatillon's demands at I.1.10–11 (though Poitiers is not included). F here prints *Angiers* for *Anjou* and repeats the error at 487 below. Since 487–9 make it clear that Shakespeare differentiates between Angiers and Anjou, and since he gets it right at I.1.11 and II.1.528, it seems justifiable to avoid confusion by correcting the F reading here and at 487.
- 156 *Brittaine*: Brittany (the metre necessitates the retention of the old form, and the old spelling avoids confusion with modern Britain, though the pronunciation is the same). Arthur inherited the titles of Duke of Brittany and Earl of Richmond through his mother, but was not formally recognized in them by John (his overlord) until after the treaty dramatized at the end of this scene.
- 160, 161 *it*: Its. The abbreviated form is part of the baby-talk Constance sarcastically adopts in this speech.
- 163–5 *Good my mother ... this coil that's made for me*: Arthur's part in this scene is small, but unlike the more vociferous contestants in the dispute, he is given opportunities to attract genuine emotional sympathy from the audience.
- 165 *coil*: Commotion, fuss.
- 168 *wrongs*: (Active sense) offences, crimes.
shames: (Active sense) insults, words causing shame.
- 169 *Draws*: Singular verb after plural subject; the usage is not uncommon in Shakespeare when subject and verb are widely separated.
heaven-moving pearls: Arthur's tears.

- 170 *in nature of a fee*: As a fee. The idea is that the *pearls* of Arthur's tears will, like the fee which retains a lawyer, secure the assistance of heaven on Arthur's behalf.
- 171 *crystal beads*: Tears. The image may allude to numerous travellers' tales of bribing savages with coloured beads. The idea of prayer-beads, rosaries, may also be present.
- 173 *slanderer of heaven and earth*: By suggesting that heaven will listen to an unjust cause (Arthur's) and by making accusations that are contrary to truth.
- 174 *injurer of heaven and earth*: By flouting all laws, divine and human.
- 175 *Thou and thine*: You and your son (John).
- 176 *dominations*: Possessions, dominions.
royalties: Royal position and dues.
- 177 *eldest son's son*: This is perhaps the most interesting of Shakespeare's apparent distortions of fact in order to emphasize Arthur's rightful claims (see note to 2 above). It can be argued that the expression is elliptical – not 'the son of your eldest son', but 'your eldest grandson' – but the immediate impression created on the audience must be that Arthur is the son of Coeur-de-lion. In all these instances (2, 6, 13, 105 and 177), the speaker is from Arthur's side: Shakespeare may be distorting historical truth not only to emphasize Arthur's claim but also to expose the methods of political argument.
eldest: One syllable.
- 178 *Infortunate in nothing but in thee*: Constance's meaning is concentrated: there is nothing to keep Arthur from the high power to which he was born, except his grandmother, and she, his only misfortune, has deprived him of all his fortunes.
- 179–82 *Thy sins are visited in this poor child ... sin-conceiving womb*: Echoing the Second Commandment (Exodus 20:5): '... and visit the sin of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation ...'
- 180 *The canon of the law*: The biblical decree alluded to in these lines.
- 182 *sin-conceiving womb*: Cf. Psalm 51:5: 'and in sin my mother conceived me'. Constance returns to the point of 124–31, implying sexual infidelity on Eleanor's part, and preparing for the strong suggestions of John's bastardy in her next speech.
- 183 *Bedlam*: Lunatic. (The word is a contraction from the 'Bethlehem Hospital', the principal asylum for the insane in

Elizabethan London.)

184–90 *That he is not only plaguèd for her sin ... And all for her:*

Constance's rage issues in verbal ingenuity which seems more effective in its general pattern than in its precise meaning. The passage might be paraphrased as follows: 'Arthur is not only punished for Queen Eleanor's sin, but God has also made her and King John (her *sin*, sinful offspring, or, perhaps, offspring conceived in sin) the means of that punishment, so that Arthur (*this removèd issue*) is punished both for *and* by her (184–7); thus her past sins create his present injury; she is the beadle who punishes her own offences in the person of Arthur who must suffer all for her, both the misfortune consequent upon her sins, and the power that she and her son wield in the punishment of them.'

184 *he is*: Elision to one syllable is required by the metre.

186 *removèd issue*: Generation 'at one remove' from direct issue (that is, her grandson, Arthur). Constance is still thinking of the quotation from Exodus.

188 *injury*: (Active sense) injuriousness, the punishment she inflicts (quibbling on *injury* in the preceding line, where the word is used passively).

beadle: The parish beadle was responsible for punishing petty criminals, usually by whipping.

191 *unadvisèd*: Rash, ill-advised (in making such accusations without knowing about the will).

scold: Quarrelling, vituperative woman.

192 *A will*: As Holinshed makes clear, and as *The Troublesome Reign* dramatizes in its preliminary episode, Richard I's will had declared John heir to all his lands (on both sides of the English Channel). By mentioning the will only in the undignified wrangling between the mothers, Shakespeare robs it of any credibility and thus maintains the dramatic balance between John and Arthur.

193–4 *will*: (1) Last testament *or* (2) personal desire, greed, lust.

194 *A woman's will*: At the period of the play's composition the will of a married woman was invalid in law because of the fear of the husband's influence. Constance, with the quibble on the two senses of *will*, reverses the idea of such influence into the accusation that Richard I's will was the result of pressure from his mother.

196 *this presence*: Those here present (but also with the idea of

being in the ‘royal presence’).

to cry aim: To encourage archers when shooting (and thence applied more generally), but also possibly punning on ‘to cry amen’ (to act a subordinate role, like clerks at a church service, in a conflict of words).

197 *repetitions*: Recitals of accusations and recriminations (five syllables).

198 *trumpet*: Trumpeter.

200 *admit*: Accept (with the possible secondary meaning that the King whose claims are accepted will be ‘admitted’ to the town).

Enter Hubert: On the problem of F’s speech-prefixes for Hubert in this scene, see [An Account of the Text](#), pp. 105–6. Shakespeare brings Hubert into the play earlier than *The Troublesome Reign*, and he has deliberately dropped the indication of nobility (Hubert de Burgh) which the source play takes over from Holinshed’s references to the great soldier and justiciar of history. The role is obviously designed for an actor of marked ugliness (see [IV.1.102](#), [IV.2.71–2](#), [221–2](#), [224](#), [257](#) and [263–6](#), and [IV.3.123](#)). This idea does not come from *The Troublesome Reign*; Shakespeare deliberately adds it to show the gradual revelation of loyalty and honesty behind ugliness, the paradox paralleling the Bastard’s demonstration of his greater worthiness to wield power than the legitimately descended claimants.

upon the walls: This F direction calls for the use of the upper stage. Hubert remains there for the rest of the scene, observing the military and political contest going on beneath him (325–7 and 374–6).

201 *warned*: Called.

202 *’Tis France, for England*: It is the King of France, on behalf of the King of England (that is, according to the French view, Arthur).

England, for itself: Implying that the true king needs no representative but himself.

205 *parle*: Conference, parley (one syllable).

206 *advantage*: Benefit. John here takes Philip by surprise on a tiny scale just as the speed of his invasion has taken him by surprise on the grand scale. Being outmanoeuvred seems to rankle with Philip (see 482–3 below).

207–21 *These flags of France ... to rush upon your peace*: John’s account is in substance true: the French were about to begin bombarding Angiers when Chatillon arrived (see 37–43 above).

- 208 *the eye and prospect of your town*: Personification of the town continues from 37–8.
- 209 *to your endamage*: With the purpose of injuring you.
- 210 *bowels*: The bowels were thought to be the seat of mercy. John deliberately misapplies the image to the destruction-bearing inner parts of the cannon.
- 212 *iron indignation*: The cannon-balls.
- 214 *proceeding*: The assault and capture that will follow the siege.
- 215 *your city's eyes, your winking gates*: The comparison of the exterior of the city to the human face continues from 208. The gates, like eyes beneath the *brows* (38) of the walls, are closed (*winking*, in the older sense of having the eyes shut as in sleep), and the metaphor continues with *sleeping* (216) and perhaps even *beds* (219).
- 216–17 *stones*, | *That as a waist doth girdle you about*: The walls of the city.
- 217 *waist*: Girdle (not, here, part of the human body).
doth: Singular verb after plural subject (*stones*, 216), influenced by the interposition of singular *waist*.
- 218 *ordinance*: Artillery, cannon.
- 219–20 *from their fixèd beds of lime* | *Had been dishabited*: Would have been broken down from their foundations.
- 223 *painfully*: With care and diligence (having taken pains).
with much expedient march: By marches of great speed.
- 224 *Have brought a countercheck*: His army has checked or countered the French in their intentions against Angiers.
- 225 *your city's threatened cheeks*: Continuing the metaphor of 208 and 215.
- 226 *amazed*: Astounded with fear (much stronger than the modern sense).
- 227–30 *instead of bullets ... error in your ears*: Instead of making the walls of your city shake by the bombardment of their cannon, the French are bombarding your ears with words – words which are a cloak for their real purposes and intended only to delude you.
- 231 *trust accordingly*: Trust as they deserve (that is, not at all).
- 232 *us*: Emphatically – instead of the *bullets* and *words* of the French King.
laboured: Exhausted by effort and anxiety.
spirits: One syllable: 'sprites'.
- 233 *Forwearied*: Worn out.

- 234 *Craves*: Singular verb after plural subject, *spirits*, not *King*, being the subject.
harbourage: Admittance, shelter.
- 235 *said*: Spoken. (The verb was used intransitively in Shakespeare's time.)
- 237 *upon the right*: In support of the rightful claims (punning on the *right hand* of the preceding line).
- 240 *enjoys*: Has possession and use of.
- 241–2 *For this downtrodden equity we tread* | *In warlike march*: It is on behalf of his oppressed right that we are in arms.
- 243–6 *no further enemy to you ... Religiously provokes*: No more your enemy than we are forced to be by the zealous aid which it is our natural and Christian duty to give to this oppressed child.
- 244 *zeal*: see note to 19 above. The word looks forward to *Religiously* at 246.
- 248 *owes*: Has the sole right to (playing on *owe* in the more modern sense in the previous line).
- 249 *muzzled bear*: Bears, used in bear-baitings for public entertainment, were not an uncommon sight in Elizabethan London.
- 250 *Save in aspect*: Two meanings are possible, depending on whether one takes the phrase as referring to *bear* or *offence*. If the former, the French King seems appropriately absurd in qualifying his own rather extravagant metaphor: the likeness, he says, will not extend to physical appearance. If the second meaning is taken, the phrase suggests that the French arms will still be 'offensive' in *aspect*, though not otherwise. Shakespeare is in perfect command of the situation as he allows the pompous rhetoric of the politicians to get them into such difficulties. *aspect* is accented on the second syllable.
hath: Will have. ('Arms' is usually treated as singular in Elizabethan usage.)
offence: Capacity to hurt.
- 251–2 *Our cannons' malice ... clouds of heaven*: Once loaded the cannons must be fired; there is no way of unloading them. But they will be fired harmlessly into the air.
- 253 *a blessed and unvexed retire*: A peaceful and unmolested withdrawal.
- 254 *unhacked swords*: The sharp cutting-edge of a sword would be hacked and jagged after a battle.
unbruised: Unmarked (without dents).

- 255 *lustly blood*: The eager soldiers who, King Philip believes, make up his army.
- 258 *fondly pass*: Foolishly ignore or reject.
- 259 *roundure*: Roundness (walls without angles being more easily defended because they have no obvious points for attack).
old-faced: The ‘face’ image again – see 38, 208, 215 and 225 – with a quibble on the ‘facing’ (outer layer) of the walls.
- 260 *messengers of war*: Cannon-balls.
- 261 *these English and their discipline*: These English, skilled though they are in war.
discipline: Military skill.
- 262 *rude*: Rough, rugged, though perhaps also with the sense ‘unmannerly’ (in their failure to welcome Philip’s arrival).
- 263–4 *call us lord* | *In that behalf which we have challenged it*: The ambiguity of this is a telling comment on King Philip’s rhetoric. A few lines before (241–6), he has said that he comes only to secure Arthur’s right; now Angiers is being required to call him *lord*, to do him homage. If the city accepts Arthur’s theoretical claim it will be King Philip who will in practice become its ruler.
- 264 *which*: In which.
- 265–6 *give the signal to our rage* | *And stalk in blood*: The image again demonstrates Philip’s transparent hypocrisy; his *rage* (an emotion which, if genuine, is sudden and beyond control) is to him a mood which he can *signal* into being. (Cf. 53 above.)
- 266 *possession*: Four syllables.
- 269 *me*: The metre places the stress firmly here. Among all the royal plurals, the singular pronoun is conspicuous, throwing into relief the grasping selfishness of motive.
- 274 *witnesses*: They will bear active witness in battle, and have already borne passive witness of their loyalty by following John.
- 276, 279 *Bastards and else ... Some bastards too*: The Bastard’s extra-metrical interjections are addressed to the audience and do not interrupt the pompous regularity of the Kings’ verse lines.
- 276 *and else*: The sense of ‘and suchlike’ is present along with the sense of ‘and otherwise’.
- 277 *To verify our title with their lives*: To die, if necessary, in defence of my cause (my claim to the English crown).
- 278 *bloods*: (1) Men of good breeding or (2) men of high blood or courage.
- 280 *Stand in his face*: Oppose him.
- 281 *compound*: Reach an agreed decision.

- 282 *We, for the worthiest, hold the right from both*: We refuse to give our allegiance to either side so as to keep it for the man who proves most worthy.
- 284 *everlasting residence*: Heaven or hell.
- 285 *fleet*: Pass away, fly (often used of the souls of the dying).
- 286 *dreadful trial of our kingdom's king*: Terrifying contest to prove who is King of England.
- 287 *chevaliers*: Knights (three syllables, accented on the last).
- 288–90 *Saint George ... Teach us some fence*: The Bastard's traditional pre-battle invocation of the English patron saint is mixed with the homely image of the inn-sign, thus continuing the development of his relationship with the audience.
- 288 *swinged*: Thrashed, beat. The verb has an unexpectedly cheerful familiarity as applied to St George.
- 289 *Sits on's horseback at mine hostess' door*: As an inn-sign. A 'George and Dragon' was a common inn-sign in Elizabethan England, though inn-signs were unknown in John's reign.
on's: On his (colloquial).
- 290 *Teach us some fence*: Make us good swordsmen.
- 290–93 *Sirrah ... make a monster of you*: In *The Troublesome Reign* the Bastard directs a similar threat at the Dauphin after his marriage to Blanche has been suggested: 'But let the frolic Frenchman take no scorn | If Philip front him with an English horn' (1.798–9). Shakespeare has omitted the idea of an attachment between the Bastard and Blanche, and the threat is thus transferred to Austria. Since we have heard nothing at all of Austria's wife its relevance might seem a little strained. But it fits in well enough with the Bastard's other attacks on his father's killer, and continues to build up the audience's image of the carefree adventurer, as adept in sexual as in military conquest.
- 291 *den ... lioness*: The Bastard is sarcastically literal about Austria's leonine pretensions, and also puns on the colloquial use of *lioness* for 'whore'.
- 292 *set an ox-head to your lion's hide*: Add the head of an ox to the lion-skin you wear. (The horns of the ox-head would signify that Austria is a cuckold.)
- 294 *roar*: The Bastard's mockery of Austria is reinforced by the rhyme.
- 296 *appointment*: Order and readiness.
- 297 *take advantage of the field*: Get the best battle positions.
- 299 *the rest*: Presumably the reserve, kept in readiness in a

position from which they can see when they will be needed.

God and our right: 'Dieu et mon droit' – an English royal motto. Shakespeare gives it to the French King to emphasize the effrontery of his claims.

excursions: The comings and goings of a stage battle.

300 *open wide your gates*: In the tone of false triumph here there is an ironic echo of Psalm 24:7: 'Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in.'

302 *by the hand of France*: Through the French King's aid.

303 *work for tears*: Cause for grief.

306 *Coldly embracing*: Contrasting the 'cold' embrace of the dead man with that of the living *husband* of the preceding line.

309 *displayed*: Deployed, drawn up. (The French army, claiming victory in the battle, has regrouped for its triumphal entry into Angiers.)

311 *with trumpeters*: Although the F stage direction mentions trumpeters in the plural for the French herald, and demands only one for the English herald, it seems appropriate to keep the organization of the scene symmetrical by having the number of trumpeters the same on both sides; much of the effect of the scene depends on the elaborate balance of the rival claims.

314 *Commander of this hot malicious day*: Victor in this fierce and hard-fought battle.

316 *gilt*: Gilded, covered, smeared (with a quibble on *silver* in the preceding line).

317–18 *There stuck no plume ... staff of France*: The loss of the crest borne on the helmet would be the epitome of personal dishonour and defeat.

318 *staff*: Spear.

319–20 *Our colours ... first marched forth*: Having denied any loss of personal honour on the English side the herald claims that the collective honour of the English army (symbolized in the *colours*) is also untouched.

321 *like a jolly troop of huntsmen*: At the end of a chase the huntsmen would stain their hands in the blood of the slaughtered deer.

322 *lusty*: Eager, vigorous.

324 *give ... way*: (1) Allow entrance or (2) give precedence.

326 *onset and retire*: Attack and withdrawal.

327–8 *whose equality* | *By our best eyes cannot be censurèd*: Which

are so evenly matched that our closest scrutiny can discern no difference in their strengths.

331 *Both are alike, and both alike we like*: The armies are equal in power, and our allegiance is therefore to them both equally. (Like the rival kings, Hubert is capable of playing verbal tricks in the political game.)

333 *Enter on one side ... lords, and soldiers*: The F stage direction (*Enter the two Kings with their powers, at seuerall doores*) leaves vague the question of whether Constance and Arthur, who left the stage with the French King at 299, here return with him. Lines 540–44 make it almost certain that they do not, but see also 343–4, 364, 472 and [notes](#).

335–40 *Say, shall the current of our right ... progress to the ocean*: John's grandiloquent image of himself and his *right* as a great river sweeping inexorably towards the sea, momentarily impeded by the puny interference of the French, should be balanced with the estimate John's mother gave of his *right* in I.1.40–41. The image of the river of power reappears at 441–4 and V.4.53–7.

336 *passage*: Progress.

337 *native channel*: Normal course.

o'er-swell: Inundate.

338 *thy confining shores*: The precise meaning is not clear; John has already invaded French *shores*. Shakespeare may be thinking of the frontier *within* France between the English lands (see [note to I.1.11](#)) and those of the King of France.

340 *ocean*: Three syllables.

343–4 *by this hand I swear ... this climate overlooks*: I swear by the hand that governs the region that this part of the sky (*climate*) looks down on. Some editors suggest that King Philip here indicates or holds up Arthur's hand. But it is unlikely that Arthur is on stage. Philip almost certainly refers to his own hand, again revealing his real intentions by thus failing to differentiate between what he publicly claims for Arthur and what he privately regards as his own. (Cf. 263–4 above.)

345–7 *Before we will lay down ... add a royal number to the dead*: Before we put down the arms we have so justly taken up, we will overthrow you, against whom we took up our weapons, or die ourselves in the attempt. The French King repeats his oath of 41–3 above, and breaks it a few lines later.

350–60 *Ha, majesty! ... blows, blood, and death*: The style and tone of the lines are quite unlike anything the Bastard has said before.

An actor might suggest parody of the royal rhetoric, or, perhaps, an excited, temporary engagement with the falsely noble sentiments that have been expressed. In his next two speeches (373–96 and 401–7) the Bastard again reveals his involvement with the action, but he is capable there, more typically, of moments of amused detachment. When war does break out again (in III.2) the one element of the quarrel that has engaged him, his hatred for Austria, finds immediate satisfaction. A naturalistic explanation of these lines might propose this motive for his attempt here to provoke renewed hostilities.

350 *How high thy glory towers*: To what a pitch the vaunting spirit of majesty will soar.

352–3 *O, now doth death ... his teeth, his fangs*: The common image of a personified death waiting to devour men is here made more precise (and, perhaps deliberately, just a little absurd) by the addition of the idea that his teeth are the soldiers' swords.

352 *chaps*: Jaws (chops).

354 *now he feasts*: With reference to the proverb 'War is death's feast'.

mousing: Tearing, biting.

355 *undetermined differences*: Unresolved disputes.

356 *Why stand these royal fronts amazed thus*: Why do these kings have such dumbfounded expressions on their faces?

fronts: Foreheads.

357 *Cry havoc*: Give the signal for indiscriminate slaughter.

stained: Blood-stained.

358 *equal potents*: Rulers of equal power.

spirits: One syllable: 'sprites'.

359 *confusion*: Utter disorder and defeat (much stronger than the modern sense).

part: Side, party.

361 *yet*: Now (after what has happened since the question was first asked).

362 *Speak ... for England*: Say whom you regard as England's king.

364 *hold up his right*: Support his (the King of England's, that is, Arthur's) rightful claim. Some editors suggest that the French King holds up Arthur's right hand, but see note to the stage direction at 333 on the unlikelihood of Arthur's presence here.

365–6 *our own great deputy ... our person here*: King John asserts that, unlike Arthur, he is capable of managing his own affairs and needs no 'spokesman'. The truth of the claim is important in the

political balance of the play. The claims of the two Kings are the same as they were making at 202 above.

366 *bear possession of our person*: Owe allegiance to no one, have complete independence.

367 *Lord of our presence*: Master of myself, in full possession of my own royal position and bearing.

368 *A greater power than we*: Perhaps Providence, who has not yet shown favour to either side, thus denying the claims of both, or perhaps the *fears* of 371–2 which, so far, are proving stronger than either king.

369–72 *And, till it be undoubted ... purged and deposed*: Hubert steadfastly refuses to be committed. The lines might be paraphrased as follows: ‘Until the question (of which king is superior) has been resolved, we shall keep our gates firmly locked against both kings and shall just as firmly maintain our refusal to declare allegiance either way; we shall remain kings of our own fears here within the city until those fears have been removed by the emergence of the undisputed king.’

373 *scroyles*: Scoundrels.

374–6 *And stand securely ... acts of death*: This, one of Shakespeare’s many references to the illusion the theatre provides, simultaneously exposes and heightens that illusion: the audience watching the stage-spectacle, the actor on the upper stage observing the efforts of his fellows to represent a twelfth-century battle, Hubert on the walls of Angiers watching the events below with interested impunity – all these coalesce in this image to focus attention on the *acts of death* being represented.

374 *securely*: Without anxiety or fear.

376 *your industrious scenes and acts*: The scenes and acts (the terminology continuing the theatrical metaphor) which you are playing with so much energy.

377 *Your royal presences*: Your majesties.

378 *mutines of Jerusalem*: An allusion to the siege of Jerusalem (AD 70), when warring factions within the city temporarily united against the Roman armies.

mutines: Mutineers (those indulging in civil strife).

379 *conjointly*: Together, in unison.

bend: Aim, direct.

381 *By*: From, on.

383 *soul-fearing*: Terrifying.

383–4 *brawled down* | *The flinty ribs*: Destroyed the walls with

their uproar.

385 *play ... upon*: (1) Play the guns upon, aim at *or* (2) play with, torment.

jades: The word (literally meaning a horse of poor quality) was used as a term of contempt for women; it is thus doubly insulting when applied to the men of Angiers.

386 *unfencèd desolation*: The condition of Angiers after the cannon have destroyed its walls.

desolation: Five syllables.

387 *naked*: Defenceless, unarmed.

vulgar: Common, free.

388 *dissever your united strengths*: Separate your temporarily combined armies.

391 *cull forth*: Choose (with a quibble on the old sense of *cull*, 'to hug', this leading on to *kiss* at 394).

392 *happy minion*: Lucky favourite, darling.

393 *in favour*: As a sign of her favour.

give the day: Award the victory in battle.

394 *kiss him with*: Bestow upon him.

395 *wild counsel*: Daring advice.

states: Rulers, kings.

396 *Smacks it not something of the policy*: Does it not have an air of politic cunning about it? The Bastard is pleased with the *policy* of his idea, for, as his first and second soliloquies make clear (I.1.209–16 and II.1.597–8), he sees such sharp practice as the means by which he will rise.

the policy: In the special sense of Machiavellian political cunning. The definite article is here used with emphatic force to suggest notoriety.

398 *knit our powers*: Unite our forces.

399–400 *And lay this Angiers ... who shall be king of it*: The sterile absurdity of this shows the contemptible level to which politics has here sunk. There is no equivalent for John's lines in *The Troublesome Reign* – Shakespeare adds them to confirm our growing contempt for the motives at work in the scene.

399 *even with*: Flat to.

402 *peevish*: Obstinate, refractory.

404 *saucy*: Presumptuous, defiant (continuing the personification begun at 38).

406–7 *pell-mell* | *Make work upon ourselves, for heaven or hell*: Rush upon each other without restraint or order, and *either* by killing

each other create work for heaven or hell, *or* fight on heaven's side or hell's, as the case may be. The Bastard's words are deliberately ambiguous. The exuberance of his rhyme here is firmly in character.

409 *destruction*: Cannon-balls (four syllables).

410 *this city's bosom*: The personification of Angiers continues, emphasizing the brutality of the plan to destroy it.

411 *thunder*: Cannon.

412 *drift of bullets*: Shower of cannon-balls.

413–15 *O prudent discipline ... stir them to it*: The Bastard's amused and irreverent aside to the audience reestablishes the link between him and them which has been less in evidence in his recent speeches.

413 *prudent*: Used sarcastically: foolish, absurd.

discipline: Military skill, tactics.

414 *mouth*: Both men's and cannon's mouths are meant.

416–21, *Hear us, great Kings ... we to keep this city*: Shakespeare

423–55 follows *The Troublesome Reign* in having the proposal for marriage come from the spokesman for Angiers (whom he has called Hubert).

417 *fair-faced league*: A treaty that will seem attractive to both sides.

419 *breathing lives*: The living soldiers in the two armies.

420 *come sacrifices for the field*: Come as men doomed to die in the battle.

421 *Persever*: Accented on the second syllable.

422 *bent to hear*: Inclined, willing to listen.

424 *niece*: F reads *neere*, which is possible, but there seems to be wordplay between *niece to England* and *daughter ... of Spain* in the preceding line. The equivalent speech in *The Troublesome Reign* refers to her as 'niece to King John' (I.753). (Since Shakespeare has suppressed any mention of John's marriage and children (see [note to V.6.34](#)) Blanche seems also at this point to be his heir, though probably we are not asked to be aware of this.)

Look upon the years: Compare the ages.

426 *lusty*: Vigorous, healthy (as well as 'full of sexual desire', contrasted with *zealous* two lines later).

428 *zealous*: see note to 19 above.

430 *match of birth*: Marriage with a partner of honourable rank.

431 *bound*: Contain.

433 *complete*: Replete with, perfect in.

- 434–6 *If not complete ... she is not he*: Shakespeare is here offering a specimen of formal political rhetoric which uses verbal decoration for straightforwardly self-interested motives. The lines might be paraphrased as follows: ‘If he lacks any of these qualities (those mentioned in the preceding lines) one might say that it is only because he is not Blanche; and she again lacks nothing which could really be called a lack unless it is deemed a lack that she is not Lewis.’
- 434 *complete of, say*: This, the F reading, is a little strained. But if one takes *of* to mean ‘thereof’, ‘therein’, the phrase makes reasonable sense and may reflect an idiomatic usage.
- 437–40 *He is the half part ... lies in him*: After his fulsome statements of the complete perfection of Blanche and the Dauphin, Hubert now declares that each of them is only half complete without the other.
- 439 *she a fair divided excellence*: The excellence of her beauty and virtue is cut in half (until united with that of the Dauphin).
- 441 *silver currents*: Hubert, perhaps with deliberate obsequiousness, echoes John’s image of royal personages as rivers (335–40 above).
- 442 *glorify*: Add glory to.
the banks that bound them in: King John and King Philip.
- 444 *controlling bounds*: Banks containing the river (but with the additional implications that John and Philip will govern the actions of the Dauphin and Blanche and also that they will control their lands, which, as Queen Eleanor is quick to realize (468–79), is an important temptation to the French King).
- 447 *match*: The marriage of Lewis and Blanche. Dr Johnson was ‘loath to think’ that there was a quibble on the *match* that would ignite the *powder* of the following line, but there almost certainly is.
- 448 *swifter spleen*: More passionate eagerness.
- 449 *mouth of passage*: Entrance gates. They were compared to eyelids at 215 above; the present metaphor, however, hardly seems to be connected with the string of face images applied to the town.
- 450–55 *But without this match ... we to keep this city*: Having used every subtlety to insinuate his plan with the Kings, Hubert now states the position of Angiers with unequivocal determination. The proverbial expressions which he employs are nearly all dressed up in more ornate language for inclusion in his oration.

The Bastard draws attention to this in mocking the speech (455–67).

454 *peremptory*: Insatiable and determined.

455–67 *Here's a stay ... brother's father dad*: The Bastard's reaction to Hubert's rhetoric is addressed primarily to the audience. He shows a connoisseur's interest in Hubert's use of proverbial comparisons, but at 467 concludes his recapitulation of them with one of his own invention in typically homely vein.

455 *stay*: Delay, set-back, obstacle (to the course of action he had proposed at 401–7). There may also be an allusion to a 'check' (in horse-riding); see [next note](#).

456–7 *shakes the rotten carcass of old death* | *Out of his rags*: The image is complex: Hubert has 'shaken out' the idea of death, as one of the threats he displays in the rhetorical material (*rags* in the Bastard's contemptuous term) of his speech; but the idea that the *stay*, in the sense of a 'check' in horse-riding, has shaken death from his seat is also present. Death was often illustrated as a skeleton clad in rags.

457–8 *large mouth ... mountains, rocks and seas*: Hubert's *large mouth* (that is, his eloquent, perhaps presumptuous, tongue) is seen as a cannon's *mouth*, using words to beat the opposition into submission. This has, of course, been Hubert's intention.

461 *lusty blood*: Hot-blooded fellow. (Cf. 255 and 278 above for this use of *blood*.)

462 *He speaks plain cannon*: His words have the exact qualities of cannon-fire.

bounce: Onomatopoeic word for explosion, gun-shot.

463 *gives the bastinado*: Delivers a thrashing.

466 *Zounds*: (A mild oath) by God's wounds.

467 *Since I first called my brother's father dad*: The Bastard adapts a common expression to his own circumstances. *dad*. The affectionate familiarity of the term emphasizes its incongruity as applied by the Bastard to old Sir Robert Faulconbridge, and thus reminds us again that the son of Richard Coeur-de-lion is speaking.

468–79 *Son, list ... to what it was*: Queen Eleanor, whose sense of the weakness of John's position was so strikingly expressed in I.1.40–41, is first to see the political advantages offered by the marriage. That her speech should be addressed to her son alone is suggested by Hubert's question at 480–81 (which seems to indicate that public silence has greeted his proposal), and by

Queen Eleanor's own observation (475) that, while she whispers with John, the French side are also whispering together. Queen Eleanor in *The Troublesome Reign* also urges John to accept the marriage proposal, but only in order to leave Arthur with 'small succour out of France' (I.771); Shakespeare's adaptation of this deliberately re-emphasizes John's *unsured assurance to the crown* (471).

468 *list to this conjunction*: Take heed of this opportunity of alliance.

469 *a dowry large enough*: To tempt the French. The dowry John offers (486–90) is enormous.

470–71 *surely tie* | *Thy now unsured assurance*: Firmly establish your title, at present insecure. *assurance*, though it has the general sense of 'security', is also a legal term denoting claim or title to property.

472–3 *yon green boy ... bloom that promiseth a mighty fruit*: Queen Eleanor admits the great promise in Arthur. The lines might be paraphrased as follows: 'that young boy, deprived of power and support, will lose the opportunity of development to a position of strength and command which at the moment he seems likely to achieve.' The settlement which is about to take place will, indeed, utterly deprive Arthur of his, and his mother's, hopes.

472 *yon green boy*: Queen Eleanor's *yon* might suggest that Arthur is onstage, though that seems unlikely. The actress might perhaps indicate the direction in which Arthur left the stage at 299.

green: Unripe, undeveloped.

sun: The support of the French King.

473 *bloom*: The bloom on the unripe fruit, which is Arthur.

474 *yielding*: Inclination (to accept the terms).

476 *capable of this ambition*: Susceptible to the lure of this chance of fulfilling their aims.

477 *zeal*: The French *zeal* is seen by Eleanor as a sort of wax or metal, at present *meltd* by Hubert's *petitions*, and therefore capable of being shaped to suit John's wishes. The idea is unusual, since zeal is normally thought of as a hot emotion. But it is appropriate here in view of the strong element of hypocrisy in Philip's *zeal* (see note to 19 above).

481 *treaty*: Entreaty, proposal.

482 *England first, that hath been forward first*: King Philip, whose politic shrewdness prompts him to see what the other side will offer before showing his own hand, makes John's insistence on

- speaking first at 206 his excuse for not yet committing himself.
- 485 *this book of beauty*: Blanche; another example of the image used at I.1.87 and II.1.101–3.
- 486 *queen*: Queen's.
- 487–9 *Anjou ... this city now by us besieged*: John takes very seriously his mother's advice to offer *a dowry large enough* (469), and he does so without any demands being made by the French (a similar offer in *The Troublesome Reign* comes after the pressure of King Philip's request). Shakespeare clearly wishes to emphasize the extent of John's anxiety to safeguard his crown, and this revelation of political opportunism at work prepares for the Bastard's analysis of it at the end of the scene. The offer here represents a surrender to all the French demands (except that to England and Ireland), and it emphasizes this by its verbal echo of them (I.1.10–11 and II.1.152). It is a gross distortion of the treaty which Holinshed reports (see headnote to this scene), and seems to make redundant John's later concern for his *estate in France* (IV.2.128). That the offer is to the Dauphin, rather than to Arthur, will, it is clear from what we have seen, scarcely trouble King Philip.
- 489 *Except this city*: Angiers is later ceded to Arthur (551–3), thus apparently completing John's surrender of English possessions in France.
- 490 *Find liable*: Regard as subject.
- 491 *gild her bridal bed*: Enrich her as a wife.
- 492 *promotions*: Advancements in honour and dignity (four syllables).
- 493 *education*: The word replaces *virtue* in a sequence otherwise the same as that at 426–32 above, and probably signifies moral education (training in virtue) rather than intellectual instruction.
- 494 *Holds hand with*: Is the equal of.
- 496–503 *I do, my lord ... flattering table of her eye*: The elaborate courtliness of the Dauphin's reply is almost a pastiche of some of the more stereotyped conventions of Elizabethan love poetry. The adroit little speech earns the Bastard's vigorous mockery (504–9); events prove this to be justified (see III.1.313–18).
- 498, 499, *shadow*: At 498 the word has the sense of a 'reflected image', mirrored in Blanche's eye. At 499 the Dauphin quibbles on this sense and on *shadow* as a pale imitation, an unreal representation of a man, without substance. At 500 the more modern sense of 'shadow', a shaded area cast by the sun, is

uppermost. The conventional wordplay is symptomatic of the artificiality of the Dauphin's wooing.

500 *Becomes a sun ... your son a shadow*: The idea of the mistress's eyes being like the sun is another conventional figure of Elizabethan love poetry. (Shakespeare mocks it in Sonnet 130.) The Dauphin also uses the cliché pun on *son/sun*.

501–2 *I never loved myself | Till now*: The simplicity of these words in the surrounding verbal intricacy makes them stand out – designedly, for they pinpoint the Dauphin's self-satisfaction.

502 *infixèd*: Captured, caught (as in a painting).

503 *Drawn*: Pictured.

table: Surface on which a picture is painted. (Blanche's eyes are a *flattering table* because their beauty transmutes the image of himself which the Dauphin sees in them.)

He whispers with Blanche: The direction is from F. The 'whispering' takes place during the Bastard's following aside, and we seem to 'overhear' some of it in Blanche's speech beginning at 510.

504–9 *Drawn in the flattering table ... a lout as he*: In *The Troublesome Reign* the Bastard's antipathy to the proposed marriage derives from his own wish to marry Blanche. Shakespeare's omission of this motive allows the Bastard's contempt to be more objective, revealing the same hatred of verbal ostentation and hypocrisy as he showed at 455–67. Even as he mocks the verbal skill of the Dauphin, the elaborate rhyme-scheme of this speech shows the Bastard to be capable of beating him at his own game; Shakespeare continues to emphasize the Bastard's intelligence.

504–7 *Drawn ... Hanged ... quartered ... love's traitor*: Alluding to the form of execution imposed for treason: after being hanged, the bodies of traitors were disembowelled (*Drawn*) and cut up (*quartered*).

506 *quartered*: It was a common figure of love poetry to describe one's heart as lodged (*quartered*) in one's mistress's. The Bastard adds an extra cliché to those provided by the Dauphin, even as his wit is devastating the whole sequence.

509 *In such a love*: (1) Showing such feelings of love (that is, no genuine feelings at all) or (2) loving, or professing to love, such a person (Blanche).

510–20 *My uncle's will ... merit any hate*: The speech is apparently a part of the 'whispering' indicated by the F stage direction at

503, and seems to answer an unheard question (which might be imagined as a proposal). The coolness and propriety of Blanche's declaration are important: she is the tool of the politicians, but retains the respect of the audience.

511–15 *If he see aught in you ... to my love*: If he (King John) sees qualities in you of which he approves I can very easily bring myself to approve of them too, whatever they are; or, to speak more precisely, if you wish me to, I will easily make myself love them. Blanche chooses her words with care: to *translate* and *enforce* feelings hardly suggests their vehemence.

515 *easily*: Two syllables.

516–18 *Further I will not flatter ... Than this*: The expression is elliptical: 'I will not flatter you by going so far as to say that everything I see in you deserves to be loved, but I will say this ...'

519 *churlish thoughts*: An ungenerous, hostile attitude.

522, 523 *still*: Always, ever.

527–8 *Volquessen, Touraine, Maine, | Poitiers, and Anjou, these five provinces*: The words are an exact repetition of the French King's demand in *The Troublesome Reign* (I.827–8). In the source play they are King Philip's response to an invitation to state his further requirement beyond Blanche's 'dowry out of Spain' and 30,000 marks, and the demand is accepted by John only after protest, and consultation with his mother. (Cf. 487–9 above.)

527 *Volquessen*: The Vexin, the area around Rouen – and not really a 'province', as it is called at 528. The name is an addition to the list at 487, and of all these territorial concessions, this is the only one with a historical foundation in Holinshed.

529–30 *this addition more, | Full thirty thousand marks of English coin*: The cash dowry echoes *The Troublesome Reign*, where John offers 'thirty thousand marks of stipend coin' (I.841); the figure derives from Holinshed. The sum is £20,000, a mark being two-thirds of a pound.

529 *this addition*: With a quibble on *addition* as the sum of money.

531 *pleased withal*: Satisfied with this settlement. (The French King, originally caught at a disadvantage by the speed of John's arrival, has every reason to be pleased with the extraordinary generosity which John's anxiety has forced him into offering.)

532 *daughter*: Blanche, soon to be King Philip's daughter-in-law.

533 *It likes us well*: We are (I am) fully satisfied.

533–4 *close your hands. | And your lips too*: The joining of hands in a ceremony of betrothal sometimes included a formal kiss.

- 535 *assured*: Betrothed (quibbling on *assured* meaning ‘certain’ in the preceding line).
- 537 *that amity*: The English and French leaders, united in friendship by the marriage-treaty.
- 538 *at Saint Mary’s chapel presently*: The line closely echoes *The Troublesome Reign*, I.857; Holinshed gives no details of the wedding, which in any case took place two years after the betrothal.
- presently*: Immediately.
- 540–42 *Is not the Lady Constance ... interrupted much*: In the equivalent scene of *The Troublesome Reign*, Constance is present throughout the marriage negotiations, which she interrupts with numerous vain protests. Shakespeare’s decision to remove her from the stage while the politicians smoothly pursue commodity, and then to give her a scene of individual grief (III.1.1–74), is a considerable improvement on this.
- 541 *this match made up*: The marriage (and alliance) just agreed.
- 543 *is*: Singular verb with plural subject, as commonly when subject follows verb.
- who*: Whoever, anyone who.
- 544 *sad and passionate*: Full of violent grief. The reason for Constance’s mood is not fully clear: King Philip indicates (545–6) that she has not yet received news of the treaty, and at the beginning of III.1 we see her first reaction to this news. Presumably the mood is a continuation of that in which she was silenced at 195.
- 548–50 *In her right we came ... To our own vantage*: This is an interesting and accurate admission, preparing for the Bastard’s remarks at 584–6.
- 549 *turned another way*: Turned our backs on, disregarded.
- 550–58 *We will heal up all ... stop her exclamation*: The next act will demonstrate the absurdity of John’s hopefulness, if Constance’s earlier determination has not already done so.
- 551–3 *Duke of Brittain ... lord of*: This trivial threefold consolation for the total destruction of Arthur’s hopes comes directly from *The Troublesome Reign*, which takes over from Holinshed the account of John doing homage for Brittany to King Philip, and then receiving homage for it from Arthur. The gift of Angiers is unhistorical, but conveniently settles the fate of the town which has been the subject of the arguments and fighting of the scene. That it can be so lightly given away after all this

provides a fitting prelude to the Bastard's soliloquy.

554 *speedy messenger*: F gives no direction for a messenger's exit here. At the beginning of III.1 it appears that the Earl of Salisbury performed the office. Salisbury is not named in F as onstage here (see note to the stage direction at 83 above), but a director could legitimately have him leave the stage at this point, establishing a link with the next scene.

554–5 *repair* | *To our solemnity*: Come to our solemn festival (the celebration of marriage).

556 *fill up the measure of her will*: Satisfy the full extent of her demands.

557 *so*: In such a way.

558 *stop her exclamation*: Silence her loud reproaches.

exclamation: Five syllables.

559 *as well as haste will suffer us*: With as much dignity and preparation as the need for haste allows.

560 *unlooked-for, unprepared pomp*: Unexpected and unplanned ceremony.

Exeunt all but the Bastard: F reads simply 'Exeunt', which has been thought to indicate that the soliloquy is an afterthought on Shakespeare's part. But the analysis and perspective provided by this summing-up from the one man to have remained aloof from the contamination of politics seem essential to the play's structure.

561 *composition*: Treaty, agreement.

562–3 *John ... departed with a part*: The generosity of John's concessions has astonished the Bastard.

562 *stop Arthur's title in the whole*: Bar or preclude Arthur from the full extent of his claims.

563 *willingly departed with a part*: The immediate sense is 'voluntarily, cheerfully, given up a part of his possessions', but the Bastard puns on the fact that John has just left the stage (*departed*), the owner of only *a part* of the lands which he had when he entered.

willingly: John's spontaneity in giving away territory was observable at 487–9 and 527–30.

564–6 *France ... God's own soldier*: The Bastard mocks the French pretence to be fulfilling God's will in supporting Arthur (112–17 above).

564 *conscience*: Obedience to the dictates of conscience.

565 *zeal*: See the note to 19 above.

field: Of battle.

566–7 *rounded in the ear* | *With that same purpose-changer*:

Whispered secretly to by that changer of men's purposes.

567–82 *With that same purpose-changer ... this all-changing word*:

This excited exploration of the idea of *commodity* forms a parenthesis in the Bastard's analysis of the French King's behaviour.

568 *broker*: Go-between, pimp.

still: Always, continually.

breaks the pate of faith: Literally, cracks the skull of (hence destroys) truth and loyalty. The form of words allows the quibble on *broker/breaks*.

569 *break-vow*: Breaker of promises (continuing the *broker/breaks* quibble).

wins of: Gets the better of.

571–2 *Who, having no external thing ... the poor maid of that*: The expression is elliptical, the *Who* referring both to *maids* (570) and to 'commodity', the *daily break-vow* (569). It might be paraphrased as follows: 'who, because they apparently have nothing to lose but the title of "maid", are cheated (by commodity) of that title and thus of maidenhead itself'.

573 *smooth-faced*: Plausible, bland.

tickling: The word has its literal meaning, with vaguely sexual undertones referring back to the cheating of the *maids*; it also carries the metaphorical sense of 'flattering', looking forward to the analysis of *commodity*.

commodity: Self-seeking, desire for gain and advantage. The quality we have seen at work throughout the scene is finally, and with penetrating accuracy, named.

574 *the bias of the world*: That which pulls the world from its true, even course. (The *bias* is the weight on one side of a bowl (in the game of bowls) which causes it to roll on a curving course.)

575 *peisèd*: Balanced.

576 *run even*: Follow its course truly.

577 *advantage*: Seeking after advantage (that is, *commodity*).

vile-drawing: Attracting towards evil (with a quibble on 'vile, drawing', the two adjectives in their independent senses).

578 *sway of motion*: That which sways motion or intention from its true course.

579 *take head from all indifferency*: Run from, rebel against, all impartiality and moderation.

- 582 *all-changing*: Causing alteration in everything it touches.
- 583 *Clapped on the outward eye*: Suddenly catching the eye.
commodity (in the shape of the marriage-treaty proposal) has caught King Philip's attention and drawn him from his course in just the same way as the weight, *Clapped* (fixed) into the *eye* (the small hollow in the side) of the bowl, causes it to swerve. The *outward eye* contrasts with the inward eye of Philip's *conscience* (or pretended conscience) at 564.
- 584 *determined aid*: The support of Arthur which had been planned.
- 585 *resolved*: Settled, decided.
honourable war: The Bastard's admission that King Philip's support of Arthur is *honourable* implies recognition of Arthur's claims. (Cf. IV.3.142–7.)
- 586 *vile-concluded*: Vilely, humiliatingly, agreed (possibly with a quibble on the two adjectives in their independent senses, as at 577).
- 588 *But for*: Only.
- 589 *clutch my hand*: Clench, close my fist (in refusal of the bribe).
- 590 *angels would salute my palm*: The Bastard imagines that commodity will tempt him in its monetary guise. The *angel* was a gold coin worth ten shillings, with a representation of the archangel Michael on one side – and, as here, is frequently referred to in a quibbling sense by Shakespeare.
salute: Kiss. There is possibly a punning allusion to the archangel Gabriel's 'salutation' of Mary (Luke 1:29) at the Annunciation.
- 591 *unattempted*: Untempted (and perhaps also unsoiled).
- 593 *whiles*: As long as.
- 595 *my virtue*: My pretended virtue, the attitude of righteous indignation I shall assume.
- 597 *upon*: On account of, for.

F labels this scene *Actus Secundus* and begins a new act (*Actus Tertius, Scæna prima*) with the entry of the royal party at 74. The problem of the scene divisions is discussed in *An Account of the Text*, pp. 106–7 and the note to the stage direction at 74.

Shakespeare again adapts the material for the scene from *The Troublesome Reign*. His decision not to have Constance witness the marriage negotiations means that the news of the marriage has to be brought to her by a messenger, who can then act as a sympathetic audience for her resultant grief. Arthur is thus released from the role of supporter of (and participator in) his mother's rage and despair – a role he has in *The Troublesome Reign* – and can become the tender, pathetic child that Shakespeare consistently makes him. Shakespeare considerably expands the role of Constance in this scene. He wisely omits a weak episode in *The Troublesome Reign* in which John spontaneously invests the Bastard with the dukedom of Normandy, in the vain hope of provoking Austria to accept his challenge to combat. Instead, the antipathy between the Bastard and Austria is presented in the 'calf's-skin' joke, drawing attention to Austria's lion-skin and thus reasserting the memory of Coeur-de-lion.

In the confrontation between Pandulph and King John, Shakespeare is closer than usual to the mood of *The Troublesome Reign*, and to the standard Protestant view of John. On the other hand, he greatly expands the confrontation between Pandulph and King Philip. In the source play this occupies some sixteen lines, with Philip giving in immediately to the legate's demands. The issue is debated for 130 lines in *King John*, with Pandulph's ruthless fanaticism and Philip's bewilderment about where his loyalties lie revealing the collapse of any sense of a higher political morality. And Shakespeare shows, in the misery of Blanche, the human results of the situation thus produced: whereas in *The Troublesome Reign* her appeals to her husband come after John's departure to give battle, in *King John* they precede it, the collapse of loyalty being made immediate in her suffering.

The scene apparently takes place on the same day as II.1: Salisbury has come directly from the marriage negotiations, and at 74 the royal party appears from the wedding to which they departed at the end of II.1. The movement from confrontation

before Angiers, through alliance and marriage, and back to battle (in III.2) all occurs, therefore, within one day. In fact the historical events condensed in the scene come from several years of Holinshed's account of the reign: the marriage of Lewis and Blanche from 1202, the beginning of the quarrel over Langton from 1207, John's excommunication by Pandulph from 1211.

No great formality of staging is required in the first part of the scene; for the staging after the entry of the royal party, see [the note to the stage direction at 74](#).

- 0 *Enter Constance, Arthur*: Constance and Arthur had left the stage at II.1.299. They do not reappear with the rest of the French party at II.1.333; at II.1.544 we learn that Constance is *sad and passionate* at the French King's tent.

Salisbury: There is no indication at the end of II.1 of the identity of the messenger to Constance. Salisbury is important in the play only as one of the rebels against King John, but it is possible that Shakespeare intends his role here as the sympathetic listener to Constance's grief to lend some colour to his protestations of sympathy for Arthur in IV.2 and 3.

- 1–3 *Gone to be married? ... provinces*: The series of questions from Constance is rhetorically sarcastic: she already knows the answers only too well.

- 3 *Shall Lewis have Blanche*: The future tense suggests that the marriage has not yet taken place. (On the time-scheme, see [the headnote to this scene and note to the stage direction at 74](#).)

those provinces: The five listed by John at II.1.527–8.

- 5 *well advised*: Sure (of what you say).

- 7–9 *trust I may not trust ... Believe me, I do not believe*: Constance's passion is habitually demonstrated in verbal ingenuity.

- 8 *breath of a common man*: As opposed to the *king's oath* at 10.

- 12 *sick*: There is no other mention of Constance's being ill; the word could mean mentally disturbed, and may well be so used here.

capable of: Susceptible to.

- 14 *widow, husbandless*: On Constance's widowhood, see [second note to I.1.32](#). She makes much of it in this scene and in III.4.

subject to fears: Instead of being subject to a husband, to whom in the marriage service a wife promised obedience.

subject: Accented on the second syllable.

- 17 *With my vexed spirits I cannot take a truce*: I cannot calm down when I have been thus upset.

sprits: One syllable: 'sprites'.

22 *rheum*: Tears.

23 *proud river peering o'er his bounds*: Swollen river overflowing its banks. (For the image, cf. II.1.335–40 and 441–4 and V.4.53–7.)

27–8 *As true as I believe ... my saying true*: Salisbury plays the truth of his story against the falsity of those whom it concerns; the verbal subtlety is an attempt to lessen the harshness of what he says. It might be paraphrased as follows: '(My story is) as true as those who will force you to believe it (Philip, John, etc.) will appear false in your eyes.'

27 *you*: Salisbury uses the more courteous form; Constance has been calling him *thou*.

29 *teach me to believe*: Convince me of the truth of.

34 *boy, then where art thou*: The implications of the marriage are as apparent to Constance as they were to Queen Eleanor at II.1.470–73.

36 *Fellow*: Addressed to a nobleman of Salisbury's rank, this is insulting.

brook: Endure.

39 *spoke the harm*: Given an account of the evil.

42 *I do beseech you, madam, be content*: Arthur's one contribution to the scene is this ineffectual, pathetic appeal, recalling his remark in the wrangle before Angiers (II.1.163–5).

44 *slandorous to thy mother's womb*: A disgrace to the mother that bore you (perhaps with the implication that her husband could not be the father of such a child).

45 *sightless*: Offensive to the sight.

46 *swart*: Dark-skinned, swarthy.

prodigious: Unnatural, monstrous (and hence a prodigy or omen of evil).

47 *Patched*: Blotched, marked.

50 *Become thy great birth*: Show yourself worthy of your noble ancestry.

52 *Nature and fortune*: Shakespeare is frequently concerned with the variable gifts of *Nature* (inherited qualities) and *fortune* (worldly riches).

53 *lilies*: Referred to by Christ (Matthew 6:28) as the epitome of natural beauty.

54 *half-blown rose*: Rose midway between the bud and being full-out, and hence in the state of perfection.

56 *She adulterates hourly*: Constance implies that the favour shown

by fortune to King John is prostitution, total disloyalty to those (in particular Arthur) to whom fortune owes allegiance. The metre requires a slight elision reflected in the F spelling *Sh'adulterates*.

hourly: (1) Constantly, each hour or (2) whorishly (the pun deriving from the probably similar pronunciation of 'hour' and 'whore' in Elizabethan English).

57 *with her golden hand hath plucked on France*: As we saw at the end of II.1, it is the material rewards of fortune that have drawn King Philip from his allegiance to Arthur's cause.

58–9 *To tread down fair respect ... bawd to theirs*: To treat the rightful king (Arthur) with contempt and to play the role of bawd between John and fortune.

62 *thou fellow*: See the notes to 27 and 36 above.

is not France forsworn: Has not the King of France broken his oath?

64 *leave those woes alone*: Leave behind only those woes.

I alone: In the luxuriance of her grief Constance apparently forgets Arthur.

65 *underbear*: Endure, put up with.

66 *I may not go without you to the Kings*: The line seems to refer back to John's instructions at II.1.553–5.

69 *For grief is proud and makes his owner stoop*: A difficult line: Constance here seems to assert the supremacy of grief, making her bow down, as if in humility, and then, in the following lines, she declares her proud defiance of the Kings' request. In this edition the direction for her to sit on the ground (which is clearly necessary but is not given in F) has been placed after 69, instead of after 74 as in most editions. This makes the sense clearer: Constance sees *woes* (64), *sorrows* (68 and 73) and *grief* (69) as a personified entity, separate from herself. It is therefore logical for her griefs to be proud while she sits abjectly; as soon as she seizes on this idea (the *stoop* of 69 picking up the *underbear* of 65) she suits the action to the word and seats herself solemnly, perhaps even petulantly, on the ground. The rest of her speech is delivered from her position of *state* (70) on the *huge firm earth* (72).

70 *state*: The concrete meaning – a raised chair or throne – is used ironically of Constance's seat on the ground, but the abstract meaning is also present, implying the royal court of Constance's *grief*, to which even kings must come to do homage.

72 *supporter*: Perhaps the supports to a canopy over a throne, or

perhaps a reference to the ‘supporters’ in a coat of arms, the heraldic beasts on each side of the shield. Constance contrasts the cheap trappings of conventional majesty with the massive grandeur which sustains the majesty of her grief.

74 *Exit Salisbury ... attendants*: F begins a new act at this point (see *An Account of the Text*, pp. 106–7). Editors have traditionally ignored this because of the continued presence of Constance on the stage. F provides no exit for Constance after 74, but lists her as entering with the rest of the royal party before 75 (see *Collations*, list 3). The wedding has apparently not yet taken place at 3 (though it is clearly imminent), but is over by 75. It seems likely that Shakespeare wishes to suggest some lapse of time between 74 and 75, but nothing so definite as a scene-break in the modern theatrical sense: a lengthy pause would be appropriate in production, long enough to impress the audience with the strange majesty of Constance’s *state* (70) before the more mundane majesties of France and England appear, but not so long as to lose the effect of the royal entry soon after Constance’s mocking suggestion that kings should *come bow* to her (74).

F provides no exits for Arthur and Salisbury after 74. Constance, however, speaks without further reference to Arthur’s presence (with the possible exception of 106), and it seems appropriate that Arthur and Salisbury should leave the stage together here. From the entry of the royal procession onwards the scene requires a formal setting; the monarchs enter hand in hand, and attention is constantly drawn to their remaining so (see 102–3, 111, 176, 192, 195, 197, 218, 226, 234, 239, 241, 244, 261–2 and 320). With the destruction of the alliance at 320, reflected in the breaking of the physical link between the Kings, the formal dignity of the stage setting will also be broken.

76 *kept festival*: Kept as a festival or holiday.

78 *Stays in his course*: Stands still.

his: Its.

plays the alchemist: The golden rays of the sun reflected by the earth are compared to the alchemist turning base metals to gold.

80 *meagre*: Barren.

81 *The yearly course that brings this day about*: The anniversary of this day.

82 *holiday*: The word means both *festival* (as in 76) and *holy day* (as in 83).

83 *rising*: The moment at which Constance rises from her position

on the ground is not marked in F. It seems appropriate that she should rise as she launches into the first of her great tirades against Philip's treachery.

85–6 *That it in golden letters ... in the calendar*: Constance may allude to the spring tides marked in some almanacs, or to the great festivals (Christmastide, Eastertide, etc.) and thence, perhaps, to the 'Golden Number', so called (according to the calendars in the *Book of Common Prayer* and the Bishops' Bible) 'because it was written in the calendar with letters of gold, right at the day whereon the moon changed'. It is used in the computation of the date of Easter. The expression 'red-letter days' provides a modern parallel.

89 *stand still*: Remain (still stand).

let wives with child: Perhaps alluding to Matthew 24:19: 'Woe shall be in those days to them that are with child, and to them that give suck.'

91 *Lest that their hopes prodigiously be crossed*: In case their hopes are shattered by the child's being born as a prodigy, a monster. (For this sense of *prodigiously*, cf. 46 above.)

92 *But on this day*: On every day but this one.

wrack: The usual form in Shakespeare for 'shipwreck'.

93 *No bargains break that are not this day made*: Let agreements not be broken if they were not made on this day (that is, let all agreements made on this day – or its anniversary – be broken).

93–5 *break ... come ... change*: All subjunctive, with *let* (89, 92) understood.

94 *This day all things begun come to ill end*: Let everything started on this day come to a bad ending.

96–8 *By heaven, lady ... my majesty*: At II.1.547–50 King Philip had admitted his treachery to Constance. It is difficult to imagine what he will now find to offer by way of excuse. In fact Constance's anger and the entry of Pandulph relieve him of the necessity of saying anything further.

98 *pawned to you my majesty*: Given you my word as a king.

99 *counterfeit*: False coin. The term is used figuratively, but governs the imagery of 100–101. There is a quibble on *counterfeit* as 'miniature portrait', continued in the following line with *Resembling*.

100 *touched and tried*: Tested (as a gold coin) on the touchstone.

101 *forsworn*: Perjured.

102, 103 *in arms ... in arms*: Ready to make war ... arm in arm (in

friendship). Constance's quibble draws attention for the first, but by no means the last, time in the scene to the physical proximity of Philip and John.

103 *yours*: Your blood (that of King Philip's son, given in marriage to John's niece).

104–5 *war* | *Is cold in amity and painted peace*: War has cooled (or, perhaps, lies dead) in a new friendship and a false and deceitful peace treaty.

105 *Is*: Singular verb after plural subject, *vigour* and *frown* (104) constituting a single idea.

106 *our oppression*: Your oppression of us (that is, Arthur and Constance). This is the only occasion after 74 that Constance refers to Arthur, and its vagueness scarcely suggests his presence.
made up: Created, made possible.

107 *Arm, arm, you heavens*: Quibbling on the fact that the earthly *arms* (102) of Philip have failed her.

perjured Kings: In fact only King Philip is perjured. Constance now links him with John in enmity to her, and repeats the accusation at 111.

108 *A widow cries; be husband to me, heavens*: Perhaps echoing Isaiah 54:4–5: 'thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth and shalt not remember the dishonour of thy widowhead. For he that made thee shall be thy lord and husband ...' Constance continues to emphasize her widowhood.

109–10 *Let not the hours ... in peace*: Do not let this wicked day pass in peace. Constance's prayer is answered with dramatic promptness when Cardinal Pandulph enters a few lines later.

110 *sunset*: Accented on the second syllable.

111 *armèd*: Quibbling on the fact that the Kings are – infuriatingly to Constance – arm in arm.

114 *Limoges ... Austria*: On the historically separate figures here conflated, see [third note to II.1.0](#).

115 *bloody spoil*: The lion-skin he took from Richard Coeur-de-lion.

119 *humorous ladyship*: Fortune – *humorous* because fickle, changeable, full of varying 'humours'.

120 *teach thee safety*: Show you the side you may most safely support.

121 *sootheest up greatness*: Flatter those in power.

sootheest: One syllable.

122 *ramping*: Rampant (probably here used mainly figuratively to

mean 'blatant, ostentatious', but with a clear allusion to the lion-skin Austria wears, *ramping* (or rampant) being particularly applied to heraldic lions).

122–6 *swear* | *Upon my party ... and thy strength*: Constance refers to Austria's elaborate oath at II.1.19–31.

127 *fall over*: Defect.

129 *calf's-skin*: Obviously chosen mainly as a symbol of cowardice, the opposite of the valour suggested by the lion-skin, but with possible reference also to the calf's-skin traditionally worn by household fools, the *fool* of 121–2 and the *recreant* of 129 thus combining in Constance's vicious insult.

recreant: Traitorous, cowardly.

130 *O that a man should speak those words to me*: So that I might revenge the insult.

132 *darest*: One syllable.

134 *thou dost forget thyself*: John reminds the Bastard, very much a parvenu, of the need to respect protocol.

Cardinal Pandulph: Shakespeare follows *The Troublesome Reign* in calling the papal legate Cardinal of Milan (138). Historically Pandulph was neither Archbishop of Milan nor a cardinal. Shakespeare follows the sensible dramatic economy of *The Troublesome Reign* in combining two papal legates prominent in Holinshed's account: Pandulph, who first appears in the chronicle in 1211 (nine years after the marriage with which the present scene begins) and who deals with the quarrel over Stephen Langton; and the later legate, Cardinal Gualo, who dealt between England and France during the French invasion (the basis of the role of Pandulph in Act V of *King John*). Once again it is not precise historical identity that is significant, but the character's symbolic function – Pandulph is the man from Rome, representing the cunning diplomacy and the unscrupulous pursuit of power which typified the Pope in Elizabethan eyes.

136–46 *Hail ... demand of thee*: The surprising speed with which Pandulph launches into the quarrel between John and Rome parallels the similar treatment of the episode in *The Troublesome Reign*. It seems likely that both playwrights could depend on some familiarity in their audiences with the issues involved, and even for those without such knowledge, the violent confrontation between English monarch and papal representative would leave no doubt about loyalties, regardless of the precise issues in dispute.

- 136 *anointed deputies of heaven*: After the undignified squabbling of the previous scene the epithet may strike the audience rather ironically. It reflects the orthodox conception of monarchical power in Shakespeare's time (though perhaps hardly in John's). Pandulph uses this form of address to remind the monarchs of the subordination of their temporal power to that of heaven and (by inference) to the spiritual power of the Church.
- 138 *Milan*: Accented on the first syllable.
- 139 *Pope Innocent*: Innocent III, pope from 1198 to 1216 and the great upholder of papal authority against the temporal rulers of Europe, figures prominently in Holinshed's account of John's reign.
- 140 *religiously*: Solemnly, as a religious duty.
- 142 *spurn*: Kick (oppose contemptuously).
force perforce: By force.
- 143–4 *Keep Stephen Langton ... from that holy see*: Shakespeare is following *The Troublesome Reign* in this sudden, unprepared-for mention of what is, in Holinshed, a long-standing quarrel. Stephen Langton was nominated to the archbishopric of Canterbury by Pope Innocent in 1207, after two years of disagreement between John and the monks of Canterbury over two other candidates. The dispute was not settled until 1214, when John submitted to Rome. The name of Langton is not mentioned again in *King John*: through the concentration on the questions raised by the death of Arthur, political and moral issues merge and the straightforward ecclesiastical quarrel reported by Holinshed is left far behind.
- 147–60, *What earthly name ... his friends my foes*: In the sudden violence of John's uncompromising reply to Pandulph, the play comes closest to the language of sixteenth-century Protestant propaganda.
- 147–8 *What earthly name ... a sacred king*: What earthly claimant to the office of interrogator can demand an answer from an anointed king?
- 147 *earthly*: Often emended to 'earthly'; but the F spelling perhaps reflects the force of John's contempt.
name: Title, claim.
interrogatories: Questions (in particular those asked formally of a witness or defendant in a court of law).
- 148 *task*: Bring to task, challenge. F reads *tast*, normally emended to *task*, sometimes to *tax*.

- 151 *charge me to an answer*: Command an answer from me.
- 152 *this tale*: The surprisingly baldly stated description of the Pope just offered.
- 153 *Italian priest*: A common epithet for the Pope among sixteenth-century Protestant polemicists, repeated from *The Troublesome Reign*, I.980.
- 154 *tithe or toll*: Collect ecclesiastical revenues (a tithe being in theory a tenth of a man's income paid in tax to the Church). The phrase repeats *The Troublesome Reign*, I.980–81.
- 155 *under God*: F reads *vnder heauen*, but 156 makes it clear that censorship has altered the text here (see [An Account of the Text](#), p. 108).
- supreme head*: The phrase is almost the only direct allusion to the idea of John as the forerunner of Henry VIII and the Reformation which Shakespeare allows to survive from *The Troublesome Reign*. By the Act of Supremacy of 1534, Henry VIII had been given the title 'only supreme head in earth of the Church of England'.
- 156–7 *that great supremacy ... we will alone uphold*: We (I) will independently wield the sovereign power which is our (my) prerogative.
- 160 *usurped authority*: Again a common description of papal power in sixteenth-century religious polemic; the accusation of usurpation comes oddly from John, however, who has been the object of such accusations from the beginning of the play.
- 163 *led so grossly*: So palpably deluded, so foolishly led astray.
- meddling priest*: The Pope.
- 164 *the curse that money may buy out*: The (typically Protestant) charge here is that even excommunication can be reversed by a bribe to the Pope. The play will go on to show the truth of this, though John has to surrender more than money.
- 165 *merit of vile gold*: Alluding, probably, to the Catholic doctrine that salvation could be gained by the *merit* of good works (as opposed to the Protestant belief that salvation was achieved solely through faith), and ironically suggesting that even the 'good works' could be replaced by the purchase of indulgences.
- 166 *Purchase corrupted pardon*: The sale of pardons and indulgences was one of the principal corruptions pointed to by the Protestant reformers.
- 167 *Who in that sale sells pardon from himself*: Who, by selling pardons and indulgences, puts himself beyond pardon, damns himself (with a quibble on *from himself* as 'not from God').

- 169 *juggling*: Cunning, tricky.
revenue: Accented on the second syllable.
cherish: Maintain, support.
- 172–9 *Then, by the lawful power ... Thy hateful life*: Shakespeare follows *The Troublesome Reign* in thus showing the excommunication of John immediately after the first mention of the quarrel with Rome over Stephen Langton. Holinshed places Pandulph's sentence in 1211, four years after the start of the Langton affair. The excommunication provides the play's closest parallel with Elizabethan political events. By the Bull *Regnans in Excelsis* of 1570, Pope Pius V had declared Queen Elizabeth a heretic, excommunicated her, deprived her of her title, and released her subjects from allegiance – all reflected here in Pandulph's words.
- 172 *lawful*: Granted and confirmed by (canon) law.
- 173 *excommunicate*: Excommunicated. This, the ultimate punishment of the Church, banned the condemned person from the services and sacraments and was thus a sentence of damnation.
- 176 *that hand*: Increasing visual attention is drawn to the fact that John and Philip remain hand in hand.
- 177 *Canonizèd*: Accented on the second and fourth syllables. Shakespeare goes further than *The Troublesome Reign*, where Pandulph promises only 'pardon and forgiveness of sin' to John's murderer (I.997). The Bull of 1570 contained no promise of canonization for Queen Elizabeth's murderer, but in 1581 Pope Gregory XIII was reported to have stated that anyone who put the Queen to death and was executed for it would be worthy of canonization.
- 179 *lawful*: Constance echoes the introduction to Pandulph's curse to begin her own.
- 180 *room with Rome*: Opportunity and time like (the legate from) Rome. Once again Constance's tenseness issues in verbal quibbles: in Elizabethan pronunciation *room* and *Rome* were much closer in sound than they are today.
- 181 *cry thou 'Amen'*: There may be an allusion to the commination service, in which the minister pronounced curses and the congregation answered 'Amen'.
- 182–3 *without my wrong ... to curse him right*: (1) Without having suffered the wrongs I have, no one has the incentive to curse John as he deserves or (2) without my wrongs being taken into

consideration, being brought in against him, no one has the full evidence for cursing John properly.

184 *law and warrant*: From the Pope.

185–6 *when law can do no right*, | *Let it be lawful that law bar no wrong*: Constance continues her quibbles on *right* and *wrong* from 182–3, and adds *law* to the verbal pattern. These lines (and 189–90) seem to accept the idea that curses are, ordinarily, *wrong*, but assert their permissibility in this general context of usurpation and denial of *right*. They might be paraphrased as: ‘when it is beyond the power of law to do right (that is, to secure Arthur’s rights), it must necessarily be lawful that no wrong (such as cursing) is forbidden’. The deliberate verbal confusion of questions of law and right mirrors the general situation which the play is exploring – the effects of usurpation and political self-seeking.

189 *law itself is perfect wrong*: Ultimately all law derives from the king; Constance sees King John as the usurper of Arthur’s rights (188) and hence all law emanating from him is necessarily corrupt.

191 *curse*: The threat of excommunication, the sentence just passed on John, is not brought against Philip in the corresponding passage of *The Troublesome Reign*. Philip’s continuing hesitation in the face of it (also a Shakespearian modification) is thus all the more tense.

193 *raise the power of France upon his head*: Levy the French army to attack him (with quibbles on *head* as ‘army’, ‘armed force’, and on *head* as opposed to *hand* in the previous line).

196–7 *Look to it, devil ... hell lose a soul*: Take care, devil, lest King Philip should repent and disengage his hand (from John’s), thus depriving hell of his soul. F reads *Looke to that*; the normal expression was ‘look to it’ and a compositor’s mistaking of MS ‘it’ (spelt ‘yt’) for ‘yt’, a common contraction for ‘that’, has been plausibly suggested by J. C. Maxwell (in *Notes and Queries* 195 (1950), p. 76). Whether Constance addresses Eleanor as *devil* (as she almost does at II.1.128) or whether she calls on Satan himself to look after his interests is not clear. Perhaps the ambiguity is intentional.

200 *pocket up*: Put up with, endure (a colloquial expression giving immediate opportunity for the Bastard’s next taunt).

201 *Your breeches best may carry them*: The point of the joke is uncertain. The Bastard seems to imply that Austria is more likely

to turn his back (*breeches*) on insults (the *wrongs* of the preceding line) than to face up to them, or to suggest that he regards a thrashing (or a kick in the breeches) as the most suitable punishment for Austria.

203 *but as the Cardinal*: Except what the Cardinal has said already.

204 *difference*: Choice.

209 *untrimmèd*: Unbedded, virgin.

210–11 *speaks not from her faith*, | *But from her need*: Says not what she truly believes but what will be most useful to her cause.

211–16 *O, if thou grant ... is trodden down*: As always, Constance wrings every ounce of verbal ingenuity from a simple remark. Here, *need* is her distress and lack of support and *faith* is the promise of support which the King of France gave her. The lines might be paraphrased: 'If you recognize my distress, which only exists through the breaking of a promise, then it will be clear to you that the removal of my distress would restore that promise; so that, if my distress is overcome, the promise reasserts itself, and if my distress is allowed to continue, the promise is broken.'

218 *be removed*: Quibbling on *moved* in the previous line, but also continuing the emphasis on the physical proximity of John and Philip.

220 *lout*: As at II.1.294 the Bastard uses rhyme to mock Austria.

221 *perplexed*: Bewildered, utterly confused (stronger in meaning than in modern usage).

222–3 *What canst thou say ... and cursed*: Is there anything you can say that will not lead to your deeper perplexity if what you say results in your being excommunicated and cursed?

224 *make my person yours*: Put yourself in my place.

225 *how you would bestow yourself*: Which side you would take.

226 *knit*: Joined, made one.

227–8 *And the conjunction ... coupled and linked*: The syntax is involved: the verb may be *Married*, with *coupled* and *linked* as participles describing *souls*; or *coupled* and *linked* may be verbs, with *Married* as a participle. Whatever capacity they serve, the words, with their tautology perhaps reflecting King Philip's *perplexed* state, emphasize the *conjunction*, the union of souls which is visually symbolized in the joined hands of Philip and John.

230 *The latest breath that gave the sound of words*: The words we have most recently uttered.

233 *even before*: Just before.

but new before: Immediately prior to.

234 *No longer than we well could*: So that there was hardly time to.

235 *clap ... up*: Seal (by shaking hands).

236–7 *overstained* | *With slaughter's pencil*: Smeared over with the effects of slaughter.

pencil: Paint-brush.

237–8 *revenge did paint* | *The fearful difference of incensèd kings*:

The terrifying quarrel of angry kings was represented by (their quest for) revenge.

238 *difference*: Second syllable elided.

240 *strong in both*: The Kings' hands were strong in enmity (in *blood*, 239) before they became strong in *love* (240). (This seems more likely than the other possible meaning, that *love* is strong in *both* Kings.)

241 *Unyoke this seizure*: Separate the hands grasped in friendship.

regreet: Return of salutation (and amity).

245–8 *marriage-bed ... Of true sincerity*: The metaphor gains force from the fact that the treaty has been sealed with the as-yet-unconsummated marriage of the Dauphin and Blanche.

247 *brow*: Thought to reflect character.

251 *gentle order*: Peaceful arrangement (a solution to the dilemma).

253 *form is formless, order orderless*: Pandulph picks up the French King's plea for a *gentle order* (251) and expands *order* to include the whole sacred concept of ordered government (which Shakespeare expresses in the often-quoted lines in *Troilus and Cressida*, I.3.85–137).

254 *opposite*: Opposed, hostile.

255 *champion of our church*: Perhaps referring to the French royal title of 'most Christian king'.

257 *revolting*: Rebellious (in revolt).

259 *chafèd*: Angered, enraged. F reads *cased*, which has been defended as meaning either 'caged' or 'alive' (still wearing their 'cases' or skins). But the former would rather reduce the danger represented by the beast, and the latter seems strained and flat.

mortal: Deadly.

263–97 *So makest thou faith ... their black weight*: This is a deliberately complex and tortuous speech: Pandulph attempts to prove, by ratiocination, that the breaking of a promise is religiously justifiable. The sixteenth-century Catholic doctrine that promises made to heretics need not be kept, that

‘equivocation’ was justifiable (an idea particularly hated in England as ‘jesuitical’ in the later part of Elizabeth’s reign), clearly lies behind this portrait of the Catholic prelate.

263 *makest thou faith an enemy to faith*: You make keeping faith, keeping your word to King John, the destroyer of your religious faith.

264–6 *oath to oath ... thy vow* | *First made to heaven*: Pandulph makes a contrast between King Philip’s oath of friendship with King John and his vows as a Christian.

268 *since*: Since then.

270–73 *that which thou hast sworn ... not doing it*: The wrong you have promised to perform would not be wrong if you acted rightly; and the way to act most rightly is not to keep your promise to do wrong.

274–6 *The better act ... thereby grows direct*: Having taken one false course we do better to take another in the hope of returning quickly to our true direction.

277–8 *falsehood falsehood cures ... one new burned*: As at 258–60 and 270–73, Pandulph makes use of proverbs to justify arguments which are politically advantageous to himself. Behind these lines lie the proverbs ‘One deceit drives out another’ and ‘One fire drives out another’ (the latter referring to the old belief that a burn was cured by warming it).

279–83 *It is religion ... Against an oath*: It is religious belief that induces men to keep their vows, but your vow (to John) is contrary to the religious faith you profess and now you are using an oath as the guarantee of your disloyalty to your former oath.

283–7 *The truth thou art unsure ... what thou dost swear*: These are perhaps the most complicated lines in a difficult speech. F’s punctuation (see *An Account of the Text*, p. 110) makes little sense, and the extent of editorial repunctuation and conjecture to which the lines have been subjected is a tribute to the success of Pandulph’s casuistry. As punctuated here the lines show Pandulph contrasting the *truth* (283), which Philip formerly held and is now *unsure* of abiding by or re-embracing, with the new oath which has made him *forsworn* (286). Line 285 is a parenthetical interjection. The lines might be paraphrased as follows: ‘The true allegiance (to God, as represented by the Pope and Pandulph) which you are now hesitant about observing (but which you formerly held) is inviolable – what a mockery the swearing of oaths would be if this were not so! But the oath (to John) which

you have now taken can only mean the violation of your former faith, and if you respect it you will commit the direst perjury.'

288–92 *Therefore thy later vows ... giddy loose suggestions*: Your new oath, being contrary to your former faith, is an act of treason against yourself. No victory, therefore, can be better than to take up arms for your former noble cause against the shallow, contemptible temptations (*suggestions*) into which you have now fallen.

289 *Is*: Singular verb after plural subject, probably influenced by the fact that it was the single act of taking the vows that constituted rebellion.

293 *Upon which better part*: In support of which better side (the violation of the oath to John).

294 *vouchsafe*: Permit, are willing to accept (on the conditions Pandulph has stated at 255–7).

294–7 *But if not ... black weight*: After the extraordinary complications of Pandulph's tortuous argument, his final threats have a heightened directness of brutality.

295 *light*: Plural verb after singular subject, influenced by the interposition of plural *curses* between subject (*peril*) and verb.

296 *as*: That.

297 *in despair die*: Because for the excommunicated there could be no hope of salvation.

298 *Rebellion, flat rebellion*: Austria seems to echo Pandulph's words at 289, dutifully reinforcing his argument. The eight-line gap, however, would make the echo difficult to convey in the theatre, unless, perhaps, the actor was seen to be trying to get the words out throughout this time but prevented by the vigour of Pandulph's verbal flow. Shakespeare uses the remark to provoke the Bastard into one more use of the old *calf's-skin* joke, thus relaxing the tension after the long speech we have just heard and renewing our interest in the antipathy between the Bastard and Austria, just before its final resolution.

Will't not be: The Bastard's contempt for Austria provokes him to vent a supplementary interrogative before he has even asked the first question.

300–309, *Upon thy wedding-day ... my life dies*: By this sudden switch from the corruption of political manoeuvring 313–14, to the personal suffering of Blanche, the human victim 326–36, of the situation the politicians have created, Shakespeare achieves an immediate deepening of the effect of the scene.

- 301 *blood*: The English royal family, of which Blanche is a member.
- 304 *measures to our pomp*: The music which accompanies our wedding celebration.
- 310 *hard with kneeling*: In seeking support for Arthur's claim.
- 312 *Forethought*: Decreed, preordained.
- 315–16 *That which upholdeth him ... His honour*: His honour is stronger ... than the name of wife (314) because it supports the man who supports her.
- 317–18 *I muse ... pull you on*: The Dauphin responds to his wife's impassioned appeal by ignoring it completely.
- 318 *profound respects*: Weighty considerations.
- 320 *fall from thee*: Break my treaty with you. The action is conveyed by Philip's finally letting go of John's hand.
- 321 *fair return of banished majesty*: Constance sees the French King as an exile returning to his true, royal self from the 'banishment' of his allegiance to John.
- 324 *sexton*: The sexton set the church clock and dug the graves; the office is therefore appropriately connected with that of 'Father Time', with his mattock and hour-glass.
- 325 *Is it as he will? Well then, France shall rue*: The Bastard asserts that if it is to be left entirely to time then the French King will indeed regret his action. Perhaps an element of sarcasm is implied, or, more probably, a suggestion that he, the Bastard, is more than ready to help time with his work. There may also be an allusion to the punning proverb 'Rue and thyme grow both in one garden' (time frequently brings with it regret).
- 326 *The sun's o'ercast with blood; fair day, adieu*: At 77–80 above the sun was described as solemnizing the wedding-day by its cheerful presence; the renewal of battle and *blood* has now deprived the day of its 'fairness'. (The image is figurative, apparently without reference to the redness of sunset: in the battle scenes that follow, which (as 323 suggests) take place on the same day, the sun is still shining (III.2.1 and III.3.34).)
- 330 *dismember me*: Alluding to the savage form of execution, still sometimes used in sixteenth-century Europe, in which the condemned man was torn to pieces by being tied between horses which were then driven in opposite directions.
- 333 *Father*: The King of France, her father-in-law.
fortune: Good fortune, victory.
- 339 *Cousin*: The Bastard (John's nephew). The term was used of

any relative. It is notable that the Bastard already seems to have achieved the position of deputy-commander of the English army. *puissance*: (Three syllables) troops, army.

340–45 *France, I am burned up with inflaming wrath ... quench that fire*: This notable example of the pervasive image-pattern of heat and burning ironically foreshadows the account of the poison literally burning John up at the end of the play (V.7.30 ff.).

341 *condition*: Quality, characteristic.

342–3 *blood ... blood ... blood*: The repetition is a symptom of John's nearly inarticulate rage.

347 *To arms let's hie*: This is the third occasion on which we see the two sides about to leave the stage to join battle (see II.1.299 and 415). This repeated pattern of long political debate followed by sudden warlike preparation underlines the hollowness of the political posturing. On this occasion, however, battle is joined in earnest, and for the first time we have a full-scale 'battle scene', the result of which changes the whole direction of the play.

III.2

The scene conflates three brief battle scenes in *The Troublesome Reign* depicting the death of Austria; the capture of Queen Eleanor by Arthur and Constance, with Constance's vaunting speeches of triumph; and John's rescue of his mother, with Arthur simultaneously taken prisoner. The episodes are fairly clearly based on Holinshed's account of the siege of Queen Eleanor at Mirebeau in 1202, by Arthur and his allies. The chronicle reports that John went 'in all possible haste' to his mother's rescue, and 'was upon his enemies' necks ere they could understand anything of his coming'. Shakespeare has emphasized John's speed from I.1.25, and the Mirebeau episode may possibly have influenced II.1. John's speed in the present onslaught is again referred to by the French at III.4.11–14. In adapting the three scenes of the source play, Shakespeare alters the first episode by showing the Bastard after his defeat of Austria, and not the fight itself; the second episode is reported at 6, but not shown, so that we miss the sight of Arthur at the head of his troops which the anonymous play takes over from Holinshed; the third episode is also only reported, with the interesting alteration from John to the Bastard as Queen Eleanor's rescuer (7), and the capture of Arthur presented as a *fait accompli* with no statement of how it came about. Shakespeare thus continues to keep Arthur away from

direct involvement in the political and military struggle and to build up the reputation of the Bastard which is fundamental to the structure of the play – his first battle brings the twin achievements of revenging his father's death and rescuing the Queen Mother.

The scene is presumably to be imagined as taking place on the same day as the preceding one, in fulfilment of John's threat at III.1.323. On the time-scheme, see [also note to III.1.326](#).

- 0 *Alarums, excursions*: The noise and comings and goings of a stage battle.

Enter the Bastard, with Austria's head: The play makes no further mention of Austria's lion-skin. In *The Troublesome Reign* the Bastard captures this during a skirmish before Angiers and wears it for the rest of the play. Perhaps the Bastard should enter with the lion-skin here; it has certainly been elaborately emphasized in the *calf's-skin* jokes of the preceding scene, and the reference to heat at 1 may be the Bastard's joking reference to the coat he now wears.

- 1 *this day*: (1) The day itself *or* (2) the battle.
- 2 *Some airy devil*: Alluding to the belief that spirits dwelling in the elements caused disturbances – in this case aerial spirits causing thunderstorms.
- 4–5 *Philip ... Philip*: Both the Bastard himself, and John, seem to forget the name and title conferred in the first scene. Apart from the comic mistake at I.1.231 these are the only occasions on which the old Christian name reappears in the text. In the entry direction at III.1.74 and the speech-prefixes at III.1.131 and 133, F also reverts to Philip as the Bastard's name. These all seem to be examples of a temporary lapse of memory on Shakespeare's part which does not recur. (See [also note to I.1.160–62](#).)
- 4 *breathes*: Takes or recovers breath.
- Hubert*: After his appearance in II.1 as the spokesman for Angiers (see [note to the stage direction at II.1.200](#)) Hubert now appears as John's ally. The earlier anonymity ends as he is immediately identified by name (5). Hubert's appearance here, with the captured Arthur, may suggest that he has been responsible for taking him prisoner (see [III.3.20 and note](#)); he does not appear in *The Troublesome Reign* until the equivalent of Shakespeare's III.3. We are given no information on the process which brings Hubert into alliance with John, and a lost scene has sometimes been suggested (see [An Account of the Text](#), p. 103).

- 5 *make up*: Advance, press on.
- 6 *tent*: *The Troublesome Reign* suggests no locality for Queen Eleanor's capture; in Holinshed she is besieged in a tower at Mirebeau.

III.3

F marks no scene division here (see [An Account of the Text](#), p. 107). But the break which editors have traditionally introduced on the basis of F's apparently clearing the stage at III.2.10 seems justified also by the suggestion that there has been an interval long enough for a course of action to be planned (see 1–2 and 70). For these reasons, and for convenience of reference, the traditional scene division has been retained in this edition. The action obviously follows on closely from III.2.

The material for the scene is taken from *The Troublesome Reign*. But the exciting episode in which John slowly and hesitantly reveals himself in making his wishes known to Hubert, with the audience conscious throughout of the pathetic, silent presence of Arthur, is a remarkable example of Shakespeare's creation of great drama from the inert material of *The Troublesome Reign*. It is from these five lines that Shakespeare achieves the splendid tension of John's interview with Hubert:

Hubert, keep him safe,
For on his life doth hang thy sovereign's crown,
But in his death consists thy sovereign's bliss.
Then, Hubert, as thou shortly hearest from me,
So use the prisoner I have given in charge. I.1119–23

Shakespeare has carefully removed the Bastard from involvement in this episode. He leaves the stage at 17 and does not reappear until IV.2.131.

- 1 *your grace shall stay behind*: Queen Eleanor is left in control of John's French possessions (though Shakespeare's exaggeration at II.1.487–9 had seemed to leave him without any).
- 2 *So*: Thus. King John and his mother have apparently decided on the number of soldiers to remain with her in France. Reference is again made to them at 70.
- 5 *O, this will make my mother die with grief*: In the preceding two lines John has mentioned *grandam*, *uncle* and *father*; Arthur's immediate thought of his *mother* tacitly rejects the insincerity of John's proffered consolation. In the scene which marks the ruin of his hopes, Arthur's sole line shows him thinking only of his

mother.

- 6–13 *Cousin, away for England ... becks me to come on*: This exchange, and references to the Bastard's expedition at III.4.171–3 and IV.2.141–2, are all that Shakespeare retains of a substantial scene in *The Troublesome Reign* in which the Bastard visits a monastery and finds corruption rife in various entertaining ways. The removal of this element of Protestant satire is in keeping with Shakespeare's general method throughout.
- 6 *before*: Ahead of us.
- 8 *angels*: The coins, with the usual pun. See [note to II.1.590](#).
- 11 *his*: Its.
- 12 *Bell, book, and candle*: Properties in a formal rite of excommunication.
- 13 *gold and silver becks me to come on*: The alacrity of the Bastard's acceptance of the duty John imposes, and his enthusiasm about its material object, suggest that, temporarily at least, he is trying to live up to his motto of *Gain, be my lord* (II.1.598).
becks: Beckon (singular verb after plural subject, *gold and silver* constituting a singular idea).
- 16 *So I kiss your hand*: The Bastard has up to this point shown nothing but contempt for the formalities of courtliness. It seems unlikely, therefore, that he would kiss the Queen Mother's hand. His *So* implies that his breezy farewell replaces the more obsequious leave-taking in which others might indulge.
- 17 *Coz*: Cousin (in the general sense of any blood relation).
- 18 *Come hither, little kinsman*: Queen Eleanor withdraws with Arthur but is present with him onstage throughout the interview between John and Hubert.
- 20 *We owe thee much*: The occasion of the debt is not clear, and the loss of a scene explaining it, and Hubert's new alliance with John, has sometimes been suggested (see [An Account of the Text](#), p. 103). But Shakespeare is probably only building up a sense of context for a role which is to become important, and John's gratitude may be for Hubert's *oath* (23) or, perhaps, for his having captured Arthur.
wall of flesh: Though the phrase is commonplace, there may be a punning allusion here to Hubert's earlier appearance within the 'walls' of Angiers.
- 21 *a soul counts*: A soul which counts (the omission of the relative being permissible in Elizabethan usage).
- 22 *with advantage means to pay*: Intends to repay with interest. The

crude terms in which John treats of love and loyalty as he tests Hubert's trustworthiness and susceptibility are an appropriate prelude to the proposition which is to follow.

- 23 *voluntary oath*: Oath (of allegiance) sworn without its being compelled or required. The significance and occasion of the oath are not made clear and this, like 20, is sometimes used as evidence that a scene has been lost.
- 24 *Lives*: Is still alive, vividly remembered.
- 25 *I had a thing to say*: John fails to reach the point, torn between fear of betraying himself and desire to be rid of the menace of Arthur.
- 26 *fit it with some better tune*: (1) Find more appropriate words for it or (2) offer something more substantial than words.
- 28 *good respect*: High opinion.
- 29 *bounden*: Obligated, indebted.
- 31–45 *creep time ne'er so slow ... that idiot, laughter*: Even in a play full of personifications, the accumulation here (*time, day, bell, melancholy, laughter*) is remarkable.
- 31–2 *creep time ne'er so slow ... do thee good*: However slowly time creeps forward, my opportunity to repay you will in the end arrive.
- 33 *I had a thing to say*: Cf. 25 above.
- 34 *proud*: Because of the height of the sun and the 'attendance' of *the pleasures of the world* of the following line.
- 36 *gauds*: Showy toys, amusements.
- 37 *To give me audience*: For what I have to say to be listened to (by Hubert). Again John offers a shallow excuse for failing to reach the point.
- 38 *brazen*: Both 'brass' and 'shameless' seem to be implied.
- 39 *Sound on into the drowsy race of night*: Ring on and on through the long course of the drowsy night. Many editors feel the line to be in need of emendation: 'one' or 'dong' for *on* and 'ear' or 'face' for *race* have been suggested. But the F reading seems appropriately to convey the vague interminable darkness which, John says, would best suit his purpose.
- 41 *possessèd with*: Obsessed by. (The midnight churchyard image also implies the fuller sense of 'possessed by devils'.)
- 42 *melancholy*: Heavy, sullen spirits (which, in sixteenth-century medicine, would be thought of as caused by and causing the *thick blood* of 43).
- 43 *baked*: Hardened, congealed.

- 44 *tickling*: Tingling (and also ‘provoking to laughter’, as the next line makes clear).
- 45 *idiot*: Jester (rather than madman).
- 47 *passion*: Emotion.
hateful to: Incompatible with.
- 50 *conceit*: Conception, imagination.
- 51 *harmful sound of words*: The idea that *words* are *harmful* comes appropriately at this moment from John, who is engaged in a battle to convince himself that the self-revelation and commitment that words represent will not prove harmful to himself.
- 52 *brooded watchful day*: The image is of day fiercely attentive and vigilant, like a bird with its young. It contrasts with *drowsy* night (39).
- 54–5 *Yet I love thee ... lovest me well*: John’s second attempt to reach the point, like his first (cf. 27–8 above), ends in egregious flattery of Hubert.
- 56–8 *So well ... I would do it*: Hubert’s hint seems to give John the confidence to reveal his intentions. Perhaps his use of the word *death* (57), though he refers to his own, implies that he already reads something of John’s intentions. An actor could certainly suggest this. But Hubert too is being careful about committing himself too soon.
- 57 *adjunct to*: Attendant upon, the inevitable result of.
- 59 *Hubert! Hubert, Hubert*: John’s repetition of the name is both deliberately ingratiating and also an attempt to create within himself the illusion of knowing and trusting Hubert more fully than he does.
- 64 *keeper*: Guardian, jailer.
- 64–5 *And I’ll keep him ... your majesty*: Hubert’s reply is obtuse. John has revealed enough in the preceding lines for his wishes to be perfectly clear. But for both men self-revelation is dangerous. When, in the following line, each reveals his position, the clipped monosyllables make their self-commitment as near simultaneous as possible. Hubert’s *I’ll keep him* so may, however, veil a sarcastic declaration of brutal, if not murderous, intention: ‘The sort of “keeping” I have in mind will mean he will offer little trouble.’ The presentation of these lines will need to take into account what John later says of them (see [IV.2.208–41](#)).
- 66 *Death ... Enough*: After all the nervous hesitancy and circling around the point, the final resolution is reached in the release and

excitement of one crisply monosyllabic line.

My lord.: The full stop is from F. Many editors print a question or an exclamation mark, suggesting failure to comprehend, or astonishment. But Hubert has surely understood the King's drift clearly enough, and has been waiting only for him to declare himself. The falling quietness of the line seems to reveal calm, imperturbable calculation from both men, suggesting perfect understanding.

- 67 *I love thee*: John repeats the assertion of 28 and 54 but here with the force of welcome relief from anxiety (and also with the stage-villain's typical affection for his instrument).
- 68 *I'll not say what I intend for thee*: John had promised reward to Hubert at 31–2; here he finds himself yet again wary of committing himself. When the crime is revealed in IV.2 it is blame and recrimination, rather than reward, that greet Hubert. The politician leaves himself room for manoeuvre.
- 70 *those powers*: The troops already agreed upon (see 2 above).
o'er: From England to France, where Queen Eleanor is to remain.
- 71 *cousin*: Arthur.
- 73 *all true duty*: The irony of this has, of course, just been made fully clear to the audience. In IV.1 its literal truth will be revealed.
Calais: The F spelling, *Callice*, reflects the Elizabethan pronunciation.

III.4

The 183 lines of this scene are based on a scene of only forty-five lines in *The Troublesome Reign*, though no new episodes are added. Shakespeare expands the idea of John's overwhelming victory, laying further stress on the speed of his actions. The vivid, powerful display of Constance's grief which dominates the scene (and has sometimes dominated performances of the play) is built up to its seventy lines from only eight in the source. The presentation of Pandulph, too, is much expanded. His accurate prediction of events in England and his telling analysis of John's behaviour emphasize his penetrating political intelligence and bring him, by the end of the scene, to a position of political dominance in the play.

There has apparently been an interval of time since the preceding scene: John has fortified his conquests and returned to England (8 and 10) and news has come of the Bastard's doings

there (171–3). Shakespeare follows *The Troublesome Reign* in a vigorous reorganization of historical material: the scene begins with the aftermath of an English victory obviously connected with Mirebeau and ends with Lewis incited by Pandulph to invade England; in Holinshed's account, however, Pandulph persuaded the French to prepare an invasion in 1213 (and Lewis finally crossed to England in 1216, at the invitation of the rebellious barons), while the battle at Mirebeau occurred in 1202. The reorganization keeps the dramatic focus clear: the revenging invasion follows the capture of Arthur, with the grief of Constance as the bridge between the two. Shakespeare's great expansion of this prepares the audience for a change in attitude to John: the man so recently seen as a Protestant hero will dwindle in the second half of the play as he loses power and control.

1–3 *So, by a roaring tempest ... disjoined from fellowship*: There is no hint for this naval defeat of the French in the equivalent scene of *The Troublesome Reign*, nor in Holinshed's treatment of the events immediately following Mirebeau. Shakespeare may be influenced by Holinshed's account of the English victory off Damme in 1213, but in the years after 1588, reference to the defeat of an enemy fleet would inevitably stir memories of the Spanish Armada, and Shakespeare seems to encourage this by reference to a *tempest* (1) – storms having destroyed many Spanish ships after the initial battle of 1588 – and his use of the word *armado* (2).

1 *flood*: Sea.

2 *armado*: Fleet of warships (more usual at this period than the form 'armada').

convicted: Defeated, doomed to destruction.

5 *run*: (1) Behaved ('run our course') or (2) run away. The pun also plays on Pandulph's *go*, which could mean 'walk' in Elizabethan English.

8 *bloody England*: King John.

9 *O'erbearing interruption, spite of France*: Overcoming all resistance, in spite of all France can do.

10 *that hath he fortified*: This is another detail that Shakespeare has added to his sources to emphasize John's temporary dominance.

11–13 *So hot a speed ... Doth want example*: Such feverish speed, carried through with such calm determination, such cool good order in so rapid an operation, is unparalleled.

12 *cause*: Punning on 'course'.

- 16 *So*: If.
pattern of our shame: Precedent for humiliation such as ours.
- 17–19 *A grave ... of afflicted breath*: Constance's grief at Arthur's capture has removed her will to live, so that her body has become merely a *grave* and a *vile prison* to her soul.
- 18 *spirit*: One syllable: 'sprite'.
- 19 *breath*: Life.
- 20 *go away with me*: Constance does not reply (but see 68 below, and note).
- 23 *redress*: Comfort.
- 25 *amiable, lovely*: The words imply amorousness as well as amiability (cf. *Romeo and Juliet*, V.3.102–5).
- 26 *odoriferous stench! Sound rottenness*: The oxymorons show Constance quickly regaining her propensity for verbal ingenuity as the expression of her distressed state of mind.
odoriferous: Sweet-smelling.
Sound: Whole, wholesome.
- 27 *couch of lasting night*: The resting-place of death. The phrase probably echoes Job 17:13: 'the grave is my house, and I have made my bed in the dark'.
- 28 *hate and terror to prosperity*: Source of hatred and terror to prosperous men (echoing Ecclesiasticus 41:1: 'O death, how bitter is the remembrance of thee to a man ... that hath prosperity').
- 29 *detestable*: Accented on the first and third syllables.
- 30 *vaulty*: Empty, cavernous. (Death is imagined as a skeleton, with eyeless skull.)
- 31 *ring these fingers with thy household worms*: Wear as rings on my fingers the worms that form your everyday retinue.
- 32 *gap of breath*: Her mouth.
fulsome: Disgusting, nauseating.
- 33 *carion monster*: Monster that feeds on rotting corpses.
- 34 *grin ... smilest*: The fixed empty grin of the chapless skull is contrasted with the smile of life.
- 35 *buss*: Kiss (with the implication of sexual wantonness).
- 35–6 *Misery's love, | O, come to me*: Constance's address to death ends in the tones of religious litany; she herself refers to it as an *invocation* (42).
- 35 *Misery's love*: That which, the being whom, those in misery love.
- 36 *affliction*: Afflicted one (abstract for concrete, as *prosperity*, 28).
- 37 *having*: So long as I have.

- 38 *that my tongue were in the thunder's mouth*: If only I had the voice of the thunder to amplify what I have to say.
- 40 *fell anatomy*: Fearful skeleton.
- 42 *modern invocation*: Ordinary entreaty or incantation (that is, one not uttered with the voice of thunder). This sense of *modern* is usual in Shakespeare.
- 44 *Thou art not holy*: F reads *Thou art holy*, which could conceivably be correct, evincing Constance's bitter sarcasm. But as the line is metrically short of one syllable, it seems best to assume that *not* has been accidentally omitted by the printer.
- 49 *like*: Likely, probable.
forget myself: (1) Lose control of myself or (2) forget who I am.
- 52 *canonized*: Accented on the second syllable.
- 53 *sensible of grief*: Aware of grief, suffering misery.
- 54 *reasonable part*: Brain, intellect.
- 55 *delivered of*: Freed from, with the sense also of 'giving birth to', thus freeing herself from the weight of grief that oppresses her. By 93, *grief* has become for Constance the substitute for her lost child. The sequence of images moves from death as her lover (34–5), through delivery from grief, to grief as her child.
- 56 *teaches*: Prompts, encourages.
- 58 *babe of clouts*: Cloth or rag doll.
- 60 *different plague of each calamity*: Distinct affliction of each grief.
- 63 *silver drop*: Tear.
fallen: F spells *falne*, and the metre requires the slight elision. But see [note to I.1.9–10](#).
- 64 *wiry friends*: Hairs.
- 65 *glue themselves in sociable grief*: The idea is of a tress of hairs made to coalesce (by tears falling upon them) in what appears to be sympathetic companionship.
- 68 *To England, if you will*: The line, which bears no relation to its immediate context, has sometimes been thought of as providing evidence of textual revision: it seems to be a reply to the French King's invitation at 20 (see [An Account of the Text, p. 103](#)).
- 69 *that I will*: *I* is accented in order to draw attention to King Philip's total disregard of her *if you will* in the preceding line.
- 71 *redeem*: Release from bondage.
- 73 *envy at*: Begrudge.
- 78 *If that be true, I shall see my boy again*: The metrical irregularity, and the fact that it contradicts 88–9, have caused editors to suspect this line. But Constance's change of mind is explicable by

the painful realization (82) of the effects of sorrow on Arthur, and the slight metrical irregularity is doubtless symptomatic of her frenzy.

80 *did but yesterday suspire*: Was born only yesterday.

suspire: Breathe.

81 *was not*: Has not been.

gracious: (1) Holy, full of heavenly grace or (2) beautiful, full of physical grace.

82 *my bud*: Arthur.

83 *native*: Natural.

86 *so ... so*: Thus (in that wasted condition).

88 *know*: Recognize.

90 *You hold too heinous a respect*: You take too calamitous a view.

The adjective *heinous* implies sinfulness, which would accord with the orthodox view in Shakespeare's time that excessive indulgence in any emotion was morally reprehensible.

92 *fond of*: Foolishly tender about, doting on.

93 *Grief fills the room up of my absent child*: See 55 above, and note.

room: Place.

96 *Remembers*: Reminds.

gracious: Used in the same sense as at 81 above.

98 *have I reason to be fond of grief?*: Most editors change F's question mark to an exclamation mark. But a bitter, ironic question, fiercely directed at those who have tried to reason her out of her grief, seems more appropriate.

99 *Had you*: If you had had.

101–2 *I will not keep ... disorder in my wit*: I will not keep my hair in orderly arrangement when my mind is in such a state of disorder. (As at 45, Constance dishevels her hair, having bound it up at 69–75.)

106 *some outrage*: The suicide she threatened at 56.

107–11 *There's nothing in this world ... but shame and bitterness*:

There is an apparent genuineness about the Dauphin's expression of grief which may seem a little out of character from one who was so impervious to his own wife's distress (III.1.313–18).

108 *tedious as a twice-told tale*: Tiresome as a story that has been heard before. (Cf. IV.2.18.)

109 *dull*: Uninterested, inattentive.

110 *world's taste*: F reads *words taste*. This might be right, the *bitter shame* being the feelings of the tale's teller when he receives a *dull*

and *drowsy* welcome. The slight emendation to *world's taste* seems justified, however, when one remembers the line's function as part of the qualification of the vision of a joyless *world* three lines earlier.

111 *That*: So that.

113 *repair*: Recovery.

114 *fit*: Extremity of fever or pain.

114–15 *Evils that take leave ... show evil*: Pandulph adapts the common proverb 'When things are at the worst they will mend'.

116 *this day*: This day's battle. (The Dauphin's reply puns on the normal sense.)

119–20 *When fortune ... with a threatening eye*: Pandulph continues to use proverbs to reinforce his argument.

120 *threatening*: Two syllables.

122 *accounts*: Believes, imagines to be.

125–40, *Your mind is all as youthful ... I will whet on the King*:

145–59, In these three speeches Pandulph reveals the depth of
162–81 his political acumen.

125 *Your mind is all as youthful as your blood*: You are just as mentally inexperienced as you are immature.

126 *spirit*: One syllable: 'sprite'.

127–8 *even the breath of what I mean to speak* | *Shall blow*: The concrete image is effective: his very words will pave the Dauphin's way to the throne of England. (Cf. V.1.17 and V.2.83–7.)

128 *dust*: Speck of dust.

rub: (From the game of bowls) obstacle or irregularity on the ground, impeding the way.

132 *warm life*: Blood.

133 *misplaced*: Wrongfully placed on, usurping, the English throne.

135 *unruly*: Disorderly, unscrupulous (usurping).

136 *as boisterously*: With the same force or violence.

137–8 *he that stands ... to stay him up*: A variation on the proverb 'Beggars can't be choosers'.

138 *Makes nice of no vile hold to stay him up*: Is not over-scrupulous about any means, however unpleasant, which he can find to support himself.

140 *So be it*: Pandulph's rather smug 'Amen' suggests his satisfaction with his own neatly rounded argument. That he can so calmly contemplate the death of a child is a measure of the

unscrupulousness with which he follows his cause.

- 142–3 *You, in the right of Lady Blanche ... the claim that Arthur did:* Historically Arthur's claim passed to his sister Eleanor (see [Genealogical Table](#)). But *The Troublesome Reign* does not mention her existence, and Holinshed does so only casually, never as the inheritor of Arthur's claim. *The Troublesome Reign* follows Holinshed in not mentioning Lewis's specific claim through Blanche until after the French invasion has been decided on. Later in the source play, however, the point is mentioned several times. (On Shakespeare's changes to the episodes leading up to the alliance of the barons and Lewis, see [the headnote to IV.3.](#)) From the evidence that Shakespeare has so far offered, the audience has been presented with no one but Blanche as a possible heir to John (see [notes to II.1.424 and V.6.34](#)).
- 145 *How green you are and fresh in this old world:* The mixture of amused pity and contempt is that of the accomplished professional for the novice.
- 146 *lays you plots:* Makes plans for your advantage, does your work for you.
the times conspire with you: The circumstances are propitious for your purposes.
- 147–8 *he that steeps his safety ... bloody safety and untrue:* The man who trusts to the murder of the rightful heir as the means to his own security will achieve only the insecurity of blood and guilt. The origin of this is biblical: 'Who so sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed' (Genesis 9:6).
- 149 *This act:* John's murder of Arthur, hinted at at 139 and firmly predicted at 162–4.
borne: (1) Borne out, carried through or (2) conceived, born.
cool the hearts: Quell, extinguish, the loyalty and trust.
- 150 *zeal:* In John's cause. The image reverses that at II.1.477–9. On *zeal* see [note to II.1.19](#).
- 151 *none so small advantage:* Not the slightest opportunity.
- 152 *check his reign:* Interfere with his government (perhaps with a pun on 'rein', the phrase then meaning 'interfere with, hold back, his wishes').
- 153–9 *No natural exhalation ... vengeance upon John:* Pandulph's predictions are vividly justified by the events described at IV.2.182–202.
- 153 *exhalation:* Shooting-star, meteor. (The modern term 'meteor', however, means in this context something portentous (see [157](#)).)

- 154 *No scope of nature*: Nothing within the limits of nature's power (even if slightly unusual, like the other events mentioned).
distempered: Stormy.
- 155 *customèd*: Ordinary, customary.
- 156 *pluck away his natural cause*: Disregard the natural explanation.
- 157 *meteors*: Supernatural heavenly signs (as opposed to the *natural exhalation* of 153).
prodigies and signs: Portents and indications of the future.
- 158 *Abortives*: Monstrous or untimely births (seen as foretelling future calamities).
presages: Omens (of disaster).
tongues of heaven: Signs indicating the will of heaven.
- 161 *hold himself safe in his prisonment*: Imagine himself secure so long as he keeps him in prison.
- 162–4 *O sir ... Even at that news he dies*: Pandulph now firmly predicts Arthur's death (cf. 139); Arthur, here and throughout, is seen by the politicians merely as a pawn in the power struggle.
- 164 *that news*: Of your approach.
- 166 *kiss the lips of unacquainted change*: Enthusiastically welcome the unfamiliar newcomer (the Dauphin).
- 167–8 *pick strong matter ... the bloody fingers' ends of John*: Find ample excuse for rebellion in the clear evidence of John's bloody deeds. The idea of picking out corrupt, septic, *matter* (rebellion being the corruption of proper political conduct) is also present.
- 169 *hurly*: Confusion, tumult.
on foot: Under way, begun.
- 170 *what better matter breeds for you*: What more to your advantage is there in the offing.
- 174 *call*: (1) Decoy or call-bird (used to attract wild birds to the snare or net) or (2) call-to-arms.
- 175 *train*: Attract, entice. The metaphor is somewhat strained, for it implies that the *ten thousand English* are only being tricked (not persuaded by revulsion at John's behaviour) into changing allegiance.
- 180 *topfull of offence*: (1) Over-full of, sated with, John's crimes or (2) brimming with grievances of their own.
- 181–3 *For England, go ... the King will not say no*: The scene ends with Pandulph apparently in control of political affairs, both King and prince obedient to him.
- 181 *whet on*: Incite, encourage.

IV.1

The problem of the relationship between *King John* and *The Troublesome Reign* is at its most complex in this scene. At III.3.66 John and Hubert had agreed on *Death*. In the present scene, however, there is no direct threat on Arthur's life: John's order (39) is apparently that he should be blinded (but see [Introduction p. xxxvii](#)). Yet in IV.2 there are no references to blinding and several to Arthur's death (85, 204–6, 223, 227, etc.). *The Troublesome Reign* appears more consistent: in the first interview between John and Hubert it makes no precise statement about Arthur's fate, and later shows Hubert announcing to John that Arthur has died as an accidental after-effect of being blinded. But the consistency of the anonymous play is more apparent than real: in the first interview between John and Hubert there is no mention of blinding, and the hint there about death is clear enough to have stimulated Shakespeare's exciting development of the idea. And in the source play's later confrontation between the King and Hubert, the warrant about which they argue seems clearly to have implied Arthur's death (I.1715–21). In his concentration on these scenes, however, Shakespeare has intensified what seem only vague contradictions in *The Troublesome Reign*, and he has done so in order to give each of the three scenes a greater dramatic sharpness.

Holinshed's account of this series of episodes is not much more coherent than the dramatists'. He reports Arthur, brought before John as a prisoner after Mirebeau, making 'a presumptuous answer' in claiming the entire Coeur-de-lion inheritance, including England. This is the chronicle's first report of such a claim on Arthur's part, though both dramatists use it from the first scene. Holinshed then reports John's appointment of 'certain persons to go unto Falaise, where Arthur was kept in prison under the charge of Hubert de Burgh, and there to put out the young gentleman's eyes. But through ... such lamentable words as he uttered, Hubert de Burgh did preserve him from that injury.' In order to satisfy John until his rage abated, Hubert 'caused it to be bruited abroad through the country that the King's commandment was fulfilled and that Arthur also through sorrow and grief was departed out of this life'. It is only in his failure (in IV.2) to

connect Arthur's death with his blinding that Shakespeare seems more confused than Holinshed and *The Troublesome Reign*. And his omission of the public announcement of the link between the two (which the source play gives to Hubert) seems to be a deliberate part of his overall dramatic intention (see [headnote to IV.2](#)).

A time-gap of indeterminate length seems to have occurred since the previous scene. Hubert has been Arthur's jailer for some while (41–58) and the Dauphin has had time to land the expedition that he was only planning at the end of the preceding scene. (He is in England at IV.2.110–15 and it is clear that IV.2 follows on immediately from the present scene.) Holinshed treats the episode of Arthur's blinding under 1202, the same year as his capture. (But both dramatists have already disrupted the historical sequence in the preceding scene, by including there the Dauphin's invasion, which occurred in 1216.) The present scene takes place in England: at IV.3.20 the barons find themselves, at Arthur's place of imprisonment, two days' ride from Bury St Edmunds, which makes it quite likely that Shakespeare has London in mind – and the dramatist of *Richard III* might well imagine the Tower as a prince's jail. (The 'Northampton Castle' setting of some nineteenth-century productions derives from sources unknown to Shakespeare.) Holinshed places the attempted blinding at Falaise, in Normandy.

Shakespeare has deliberately changed the time of day from that in the source play, which refers to the 'fair evening' (I.1327); here it is clearly early morning (9). A director might legitimately increase the sense of Arthur's helplessness by dressing him in night-clothes. And in *The Troublesome Reign* Arthur dissuades Hubert from blinding him by engaging in political debate on the nature of a subject's obedience to his monarch. Here we have a small boy pleading in terror for his eyes, the helpless victim of the forces of commodity which we have seen at work throughout the play, and which, through Hubert's awakened mercy, are here for the first time defeated.

- 0 [executioners](#): F gives no indication of the number required. Two would seem ample to control a young boy, but three are specified in the equivalent scene of *The Troublesome Reign*.
- 1 [Heat me these irons hot](#): The tension of the scene will be increased by the audience's awareness of the instruments, ready to inflict the savage sentence which the warrant (39) so bleakly describes.

me: For me.

2 *Within*: Behind.

arras: Tapestry hangings (used to cover walls).

2–3 *strike my foot* | *Upon the bosom of the ground*: The poetic figure is more than simply decorative: it serves to heighten the savagery of what Hubert's action will precede. In *The Troublesome Reign* Hubert instructs his men to come forward at the words 'God save the King', and this signal is given after only fourteen lines. Shakespeare's alteration creates a wait of nearly seventy lines of horrifying tension before the crude brutality of the stamp.

6 *I hope your warrant will bear out the deed*: In *The Troublesome Reign* the exact contents of the warrant are quoted: 'Hubert, these are to command thee, as thou tenderest our quiet in mind and the estate of our person, that presently, upon the receipt of our command, thou put out the eyes of Arthur Plantagenet' (I.1363–6). Shakespeare shrouds the document in a little more mystery, perhaps aware that, after the clipped secrecy of III.3.66, its existing at all may be surprising. Arthur is allowed to read it, and at 39 makes clear its order for his own blinding, though without actually quoting it. At IV.2.215, however, Hubert uses it as his authority for having killed (rather than blinded) Arthur, and three lines later John sees it as a witness to his own damnation. All these references to the warrant derive from *The Troublesome Reign*. Shakespeare adds only one extra reference of his own (see IV.2.70 and *note*). There is no mention of a warrant in Holinshed's account of the episode.

bear out: Give proper authority for.

7 *Uncleanly*: Improper, inappropriate.

The executioners withdraw: No stage direction is marked in F, and a full exit is not necessary. The executioners simply withdraw behind the arras, and might well remain visible to the audience, though not to the characters onstage, the threat of their brutal presence heightening the tension.

8 *I have to say with*: I have something to say to.

9 *Good morrow*: An early-morning greeting.

10–11 *As little prince ... as may be*: As little of a prince as I possibly could be, when my rights entitle me to be so much greater (that is, a king).

12 *Mercy*: God have mercy.

16 *wantonness*: Affectation, perversity.

By my christendom: As I am a Christian.

christendom: Baptism, christening.

17 *So*: If, provided that.

kept sheep: The wish of princes and rulers for the simple life is a commonplace of Elizabethan literature. The most notable example in Shakespeare is *Henry VI, Part III*, II.5.1–54.

19 *would be*: Would like, wish, to be. (*would* contrasts with *should* in the previous line.)

19–20 *but that I doubt* | *My uncle practises*: Except that I fear my uncle (John) is plotting.

27 *sudden*: Speedy (and ruthless).

29 *In sooth, I would*: Truly, I wish.

30 *watch*: Stay up through the night.

31 *I warrant*: I'm sure, 'I'll be bound'. Arthur's *warrant* makes a vivid and pathetic contrast with that which Hubert holds.

32 *take possession of my bosom*: Overcome my feelings, touch my heart.

33 *rheum*: Tears. There is probably also a pun on 'room': Arthur's words *take possession* (32) of all the room in Hubert's bosom, so that *torture* is turned out of door (34).

34 *Turning despiteous torture out of door*: Deflecting me from my pitiless course.

37 *fair writ*: Well, clearly, written.

38 *effect*: Purpose.

39 *with hot irons burn out both mine eyes*: This is the first clear statement of the change of plan from the murder agreed on at III.3.66. The order for the preparation of the searing irons (1), however, will already have provoked the audience's horrified suspicions, and blindness would, in any case, deprive Arthur of any hope of gaining the throne.

40 *will you*: (1) Are you going to? or (2) do you wish to?

41–58 *When your head ... So much as frown on you*: The economy of his time-scheme forces Shakespeare to have Arthur recall the kindnesses which there has been no time to show on stage.

42 *handkercher*: Handkerchief. (Richard II is usually credited with introducing handkerchiefs into England; they were unknown in John's time and probably not very common in Shakespeare's – both here and in *Othello* the giving away of a handkerchief has a significance which a modern audience may find unusual.)

43 *a princess wrought it me*: The superfluous detail heightens the pathos.

wrought: Worked (sewed, embroidered).

- 44 *did never ask it you again*: Never asked for it back from you.
- 45 *held your head*: To soothe the pain.
- 46 *watchful minutes to the hour*: Arthur imagines the regularity of his solicitous inquiries punctuating the *heavy time* (47), dividing it up as the minutes do the hour and making it pass more quickly.
- 47 *Still and anon*: Continually.
- 48 *lies your grief*: Is your pain.
- 49 *good love*: Kindly, loving deed.
- 50 *lien*: Lain (two syllables).
still: (1) Without moving or (2) for the whole time.
- 52 *at your sick service*: To serve you (as a nurse) when you were sick.
- 53 *crafty*: Pretended (in order to secure favour).
- 59 *with hot irons must I burn them out*: The simple brutality of the deed is restated (cf. 39).
- 60 *iron age*: Present age of cruelty (from the mythological arrangement of the ages of the world in an order of deterioration from the golden age of antiquity, through silver and bronze, to iron).
- 61–6 *The iron of itself ... fire to harm mine eye*: The personification of the iron and fire, here and at 103–20 below, brings together the imagery of fire and heat with the constant personifications of the play. Arthur's elaborate conceit, becoming more elaborate with every blunt response from Hubert (71, 74, 90, 104, 111), shows words for once succeeding against the brutality of power.
- 61 *heat*: Heated.
- 63 *his*: F reads *this*, which can scarcely be right since Arthur does not see the irons until the executioners reappear at 71.
- 64 *matter*: Substance (his tears, the signs of *innocence*).
- 65 *consume away*: Waste away, disintegrate.
- 66 *But for containing*: Only because it had contained.
- 68 *An if an angel should have*: If an angel had. (Angels, as messengers of heaven to earth, were of unsurpassable trustworthiness.)
- 72–3 *My eyes are out ... these bloody men*: The mere appearance of these bloody men is enough to blind me.
- 75 *boisterous*: Violently, fiercely (two syllables).
- 80 *winch*: Wince, flinch.
- 84 *within*: Not behind the arras, from where they have appeared, but in an inner room, offstage.
- 85 *I am best pleased to be from such a deed*: I prefer not to be

present when such a crime is committed. The executioners say nothing at the equivalent moment in *The Troublesome Reign*; the comment here reinforces the horror of the crime. Shakespeare may be recalling Holinshed's account, which records that some of those appointed to carry out the blinding 'rather forsook their prince and country than they would consent to obey the King's authority herein'.

86 *chid away*: Scolded into departure.

89 *Give life to*: Enkindle, stir up.

91 *mote*: Particle of dust.

92 *dust*: Speck of dust.

93 *Any annoyance*: Anything to cause irritation or discomfort.

94 *feeling what small things are boisterous there*: Knowing that small things can cause great irritation and pain to the eye.

96 *Go to*: An exclamation of impatience or rebuke: 'Come on!'.

97–8 *the utterance ... pleading for a pair of eyes*: Even the words of a pair of tongues would necessarily be inadequate to plead for a pair of eyes.

99 *Let me not, Hubert*: (1) Do not make me (repeating the previous plea) or (2) do not prevent me from exclaiming (punning on the sense of *let* as 'to hinder', 'to prevent').

101 *So*: If in this way, if thereby.

102 *Though to no use but still to look on you*: Even though they may have no other use than always (*still*) to look at you. (There may be an allusion here to Hubert's ugliness: see [note to the stage direction at II.1.200](#).)

103 *troth*: Faith.

104 *would not*: (1) Does not wish to or (2) would not be able to. The personification of the *instrument* continues from 61–6.

105 *in good sooth*: Certainly.

105–7 *the fire is dead ... undeserved extremes*: The fire has died down as it were in grief that its true function, of giving comfort, is being abused while it is used instead to inflict extreme pain on one who has not deserved it (probably with a pun on the Latin '*in extremis*', 'in the last agonies of death').

109 *The breath of heaven*: Arthur imagines that it is divine intervention which has caused the fire to go out.

110 *strewed repentant ashes on his head*: The ash-covered, burnt-out coal is compared to penitents covering their heads with ashes.

111 *with my breath*: By blowing on it. Hubert's *breath* will reverse the work of the *breath of heaven* (109).

- 112–13 *blush* | *And glow with shame of your proceedings*: The personification presents the redness of the rekindled coal as an indication of its shame at what Hubert will use it for.
- 114 *sparkle in*: Send out sparks into.
- 116 *tarre*: Urge, provoke.
- 117 *should*: Intend to, would normally.
- 118 *Deny their office*: Refuse to perform their function.
- 119 *extends*: Show, offer (singular verb after plural subject, *fire and iron* constituting a single idea).
- 120 *Creatures of note for mercy-lacking uses*: Things noteworthy for the merciless uses to which they are customarily put.
- 121 *see to live*: Live with your sight unharmed.
- 122 *owes*: Possesses.
- 127 *Your uncle must not know but you are dead*: In suggesting only the false report of death here, with no further reference to the blinding, Shakespeare may be preparing for the next scene, where we do not hear what Hubert reports (IV.2.68 v.), but have our attention drawn to the lords' wilfully assuming the worst.
must not know but: Must be made to believe that.
- 128 *doggèd*: Inhuman, cruel (dog-like).
- 129 *sleep*: Perhaps, in view of the early-morning setting, this means 'go back to sleep', though 'you can in future sleep' seems more likely.
doubtless and secure: Without fear or anxiety.
- 132 *closely*: Quietly, secretly.

IV.2

The scene makes a more striking rearrangement of history than any other in the play. The dates which Holinshed assigns to its various episodes make this clear: the five moons (182–4), 1200; the death of Constance (122–3), 1201 (not in Holinshed); the rumoured death of Arthur (82–5), 1202; John's second coronation (1), 1202; the episode of Peter of Pomfret (141–59), 1213; the beginnings of the baronial rebellion (93–102), 1214; the French invasion (110–15), 1216. Only in the deaths of Constance and Eleanor, however, and in the French invasion is Shakespeare adding to the historical mixture already present in the scene of *The Troublesome Reign* from which he is here working. Neither play makes any clear reference to Magna Carta (1215), which could fall within the time-scheme of the present scene. (But see [notes to 43–6](#), [168](#) and [V.2.21](#).)

The opening episode of Shakespeare's scene, John's second coronation, is less fully treated than in the source play, which shows at some length John's plans for it, and his response to the barons' objections. In this John makes it clear that the coronation is designed to secure a restatement of allegiance (following his excommunication by Pandulph); we also see the ceremony performed. In Shakespeare's scene the coronation is already accomplished, and the headstrong discontent of the barons, with their sarcasm at John's decision (17, 36–9, etc.), prepares for the bitterness with which they greet the news of Arthur's alleged death (86–9). Their rebellious departure thus comes as no surprise. It is also, however, less obviously excusable than in *The Troublesome Reign*, where Hubert announces boldly to the assembled court that 'According to your highness' strict command | Young Arthur's eyes are blinded and extinct' and adds that 'of the extreme pain | Within one hour gave he up the ghost' (I.1661–5). Shakespeare substitutes the secret conference between John and Hubert for this brazen announcement, adding also the accompanying whispered suspicions of the lords. This not only makes the episode more dramatically exciting, but also emphasizes the wilfulness of the lords in taking matters into their own hands.

In making the arrival of Hubert the second episode of the scene, Shakespeare departs from *The Troublesome Reign*, in which the news of Arthur's death is preceded by the return of the Bastard and the prophecies of Peter of Pomfret. Peter's prophecies include an explanation of the five moons, which actually appear onstage in the anonymous play (see [the note to 182–4](#)). The change of order in *King John* allows the succeeding series of blows (the defection of the barons, the news of the invasion, the astronomical portents) to appear as consequences of Arthur's death.

For the scene's third episode, the messenger's news of the deaths of Constance and Eleanor, and of the Dauphin's invasion, there is no equivalent in the corresponding scene of *The Troublesome Reign*, where this news comes later as the prelude to John's submission to Pandulph, the anonymous author finding every excuse for his Protestant hero's surrender to papal power. In baldly presenting us with John's submission in V.1 and in bringing these other episodes forward, Shakespeare not only shows his lack of concern for the element of religious propaganda

in the John story, but also his wish to establish links between political and moral conduct: John's collapse begins immediately his crime is revealed.

Shakespeare's holding back of the Bastard's return gives the fourth episode of the scene added strength. The alteration from *The Troublesome Reign* focuses our attention on the Bastard's calm vigour as John's power is dwindling.

The fifth episode of the scene is much built up from the equivalent lines of *The Troublesome Reign*, where Hubert is simply the audience for John's remorse at the political consequences of Arthur's alleged death. Shakespeare's detailed recall of the interview in III.3 reminds us of John's guilt even as he tries to escape from it, and the account of the five moons becomes, with the widespread fear and unrest, a vindication of Pandulph's predictions (III.4.145–71) about the political results of the crime against Arthur.

The scene apparently follows on quickly from IV.1: Hubert has come directly from Arthur, whom he left in the early morning (IV.1.9), to bring the false news of his death during the night (85); later we learn that the whole sequence of events has occurred within an hour (IV.3.104). The setting may be imagined as London, though Holinshed reports the second coronation as taking place at Canterbury. An Elizabethan audience, however, would think of Westminster in connection with a coronation, and, given the time-sequence, this would accord with Arthur's imprisonment in the Tower (see [headnote to IV.1](#)). A sense of the rapidity of events, and the panic they bring, is, however, more important than the literal details of time and place.

A formal staging is required for the opening of the scene, with a well-peopled stage recalling, apart from the conspicuous absence of Queen Eleanor, the previous full court scene (I.1). John is here apparently at the height of his power, fresh from his victory, and with his royalty just confirmed by a second coronation. Then the formality is shattered by the departure of the barons at 102, leaving John to face the consequences of earlier, secret actions in the intimacy of the three fateful interviews with the messenger, the Bastard and Hubert.

- 0 [Enter King John, Pembroke, Salisbury, and other lords](#): The number of 'other lords' on stage might be rather large. All of them will probably leave the stage with Pembroke and Salisbury at 102. The stage direction in F identifies only two of these lords

individually, but a director might well bring on Bigot here and have him leave the stage with the others at 102. He is later mentioned as seeking Arthur's grave with Salisbury (162) and is a prominent rebel leader from IV.3 onwards.

- 3–4 *but that your highness pleased*, | *Was once superfluous*: Except that it was your highness's pleasure, (it) was once too often.
- 5 *high royalty*: Regal dignity.
- 7 *Fresh expectation*: The anticipation or hope of something new (specifically, the possibility of a new ruler).
- 8 *state*: (1) Government *or* (2) conditions of life.
- 9 *possessed*: Of the crown.
double pomp: Two ceremonies (coronations).
- 10 *guard*: Adorn, ornament.
- 11–15 *to paint the lily ... eye of heaven to garnish*: Proverbial expressions of superfluous labour.
- 14–15 *with taper-light ... heaven to garnish*: To try to embellish the beauty of the sun with a candle.
- 17 *But that your royal pleasure must be done*: Compare 36 where Salisbury too speaks with sarcastic deference.
- 18 *an ancient tale new told*: A common method in Shakespeare of characterizing the tedious: cf. III.4.108–9.
- 19 *troublesome*: Annoying, irritating (but perhaps with the more particular meaning 'likely to cause trouble (in the realm)').
- 20 *unseasonable*: Inappropriate, unwelcome.
- 21–2 *the antique and well noted face* | *Of plain old form*: The ancient and familiar aspect of the simple custom of the past.
- 23 *a shifted wind unto a sail*: A wind that veers in the direction from which it blows on to a sail.
- 24 *makes the course of thoughts to fetch about*: Causes a violent shift in attitudes (that is, in loyalty).
fetch about: Change tack (continuing the sailing metaphor).
- 25 *frights consideration*: Frightens people into contemplation and questioning (of John's right to the throne).
- 26–7 *Makes sound opinion ... so new a fashioned robe*: Causes healthy, loyal attitudes to weaken and makes the truth (of John's claim to the throne) appear suspect since he finds it necessary to behave so much against the usual form. (The *new ... fashioned robe* is contrasted with the *plain old form* of 22, and refers both to the new custom and perhaps also to the new coronation *robe* John now wears.)
- 29 *confound their skill in covetousness*: Mar the products of their

skill by greedy desire to improve upon it.

- 31 *worser by th'excuse*: F reads *worse by th'excuse*, leaving the line one syllable short; most editors emend to 'worse by the excuse'. J. C. Maxwell's suggestion of *worser* (*Notes and Queries* 195 (1950), pp. 473–4) preserves the contraction of the definite article, which, at other points in F, is used with careful attention to metrical regularity.
- 32 *breach*: Tear (perhaps with a pun on *breeches*).
- 36 *breathed our counsel*: Made our views discreetly known.
- 38–9 *all and every part ... what your highness will*: All our hopes and wishes go no further than your royal will allows (perhaps with a rather menacing quibble on *make a stand* meaning 'take up a position against').
- 41 *possessed you with*: Informed you of.
- 42 *when lesser is my fear*: John reserves his right not to reveal secrets of state during a time of national danger. F reads *then* for *when*, but *Meantime* (43) makes *when* much more likely. John is apparently referring to Arthur: the expected news of his death will immediately make his fear *lesser*.
- 43 *indue*: Provide.
- 43–6 *Meantime but ask ... your requests*: The invitation derives from *The Troublesome Reign*, where it is similarly answered by demands for the release of Arthur. The tone here, however, seems to suggest broader requests. Neither dramatist mentions Magna Carta, but Holinshed treats it at some length, and John's invitation may possibly reflect awareness of the King's accession to baronial demands. (See [also notes to 168](#) and [V.2.21](#).)
- 47–8 *the tongue of these ... all their hearts*: The spokesman for all my fellows, to inform you of our joint proposal (perhaps with *sound* punning on the sounding of a trumpet to signify a challenge, thus continuing the strong undercurrent of threat).
- 51 *Bend their best studies*: Exercise their most diligent efforts.
- 52 *enfranchisement*: Release from prison.
- 53–4 *move the murmuring lips ... this dangerous argument*: Move the undercurrent of discontent among the people to develop into the following potentially rebellious questioning.
- 54–60 *this dangerous argument ... advantage of good exercise*: The syntax is awkward. The phrase *this dangerous argument ... Why ...* is best taken to mean 'the dangerous question of why ...', with 56–60 as a reported question describing the train of thought attributed to the people: 'Why should your fears, which, the

people assert, only trouble a man in the wrong, cause you to imprison your young kinsman, and to stultify his development by keeping him in brutal ignorance, denying him the advantage of a noble education?’

55 *If what in rest you have in right you hold*: If you hold lawfully what at present you possess in peace.

57 *mew up*: Coop up, imprison.

60 *good exercise*: The development of all gentlemanly qualities, particularly in feats of arms.

61 *the time’s enemies*: Those opposed to the present regime.

62 *grace*: Lend plausibility to.

occasions: For complaint or, perhaps, for rebellion.

62–3 *let it be our suit*, | *That you have bid us ask, his liberty*: Let the concession, which you invited us to ask for, be Arthur’s liberty.

64–6 *Which for our goods ... he have his liberty*: Which we ask for our own advantage only in so far as we judge that our well-being, which depends on yours, will be protected if you safeguard your position, as in our opinion you will, by releasing him.

67 *Let it be so*: The speed of John’s compliance follows the entry of Hubert, who, John believes, brings news of Arthur’s death. It is important, therefore, that Hubert’s entry should occur after 66 (as marked in F) and not just before he is addressed in 68, where some editors place it.

69 *the bloody deed*: The murder of Arthur. The present scene contains no mention of his blinding: on this problem, see [the headnote to IV.1](#).

70 *warrant*: See [note to IV.1.6](#). The unlikelihood of so secret a document being indiscriminately shown is outweighed by the dramatic necessity of informing the audience of the barons’ prior knowledge of what has happened in order that their sarcastic comments at 86–9 will be intelligible.

71–2 *The image of a wicked heinous fault* | *Lives in his eye*: The look in his eye is clearly that of a man who has committed a monstrous crime. (On Hubert’s ugliness, see [note to the stage direction at II.1.200](#).)

72 *close aspect*: Furtive appearance.

76–7 *The colour of the King ... his conscience*: The King blushes and blanches by turns, as satisfaction that his aims are fulfilled and the remorse of conscience alternately gain control of him. A similar idea recurs at 245–8 below.

78 *heralds*: The colours in John’s cheeks may explain the

comparison with heralds (whose coats would be brightly coloured). But perhaps the heralds of II.1.300–324, claiming victory for each side in turn, are here to be recalled.

battles set: Armies arranged in battle positions.

79–81 *His passion is so ripe ... sweet child's death*: The revelation of John's crime is depicted in the disgusting image of the bursting tumour or boil.

81 *foul corruption*: Septic matter.

83 *my will to give is living*: My willingness to grant your request has not diminished.

84 *gone and dead*: The reversal of the order of the usual cliché adds emphasis.

85 *tonight*: Last night.

89 *This must be answered – either here or hence*: This is a crime that will have to be accounted and atoned for, either in this world or the next. Pembroke breaks the ice of pretended courtesy with a remark of brutal directness.

90 *bend such solemn brows*: Look so fiercely, glare, scowl.

91 *shears of destiny*: With which Atropos, one of the three Fates, cuts the thread of life spun and woven by the others.

92 *commandment on the pulse of life*: Control over how long life lasts.

93 *apparent*: Clear, blatant.

93–4 *'tis shame* | *That greatness should so grossly offer it*: It is shameful that a man in authority should try to brazen out such a deed.

95 *So thrive it in your game*: May you succeed as grossly in the game you are now engaged in.

96 *Stay yet*: Wait a little longer (for me to join you).

97–8 *th'inheritance ... a forcèd grave*: The only inheritance this child, who should have been king, has been allowed: the grave to which murder has assigned him.

99–100 *That blood ... Three foot of it doth hold*: The life which should have possessed the whole of this island is now contained in three feet of its earth.

101 *thus*: In doing nothing but talk; action (against John) is called for.

101–2 *this will break out ... I doubt*: We shall all suffer when the tumult resulting from this act begins, and that will be soon, I fear.

102 *Exeunt Pembroke, Salisbury, and the other lords*: F's simple *Exeunt* gives no indication of how many people are to leave the

stage. But it seems clear that the following revelation of the collapse of John's power in the exchanges with the messenger, Hubert and the Bastard should take place without onlookers.

103 *I repent*: John repents only when the dangerous political consequence of his crime threatens him. (Cf. his delight at the news that Arthur is not dead, at 260.)

104 *There is no sure foundation set on blood*: A position of security cannot be built upon a murder. John admits the truth of Pandulph's prediction at III.4.147–8.

105 *certain*: Secure, safe.

Enter a Messenger: This direction follows 103 in F. It seems best, however, to regard John's three lines as a private contemplation.

106 *fearful*: (1) Full of inner fear or (2) spreading fear in others.

109 *weather*: Tempest.

110 *From France to England*: The messenger answers John's *how goes* (109) literally: *all in France* is going to England, a large army has crossed the Channel. Holinshed records the Dauphin's landing near Sandwich on 21 May 1216. *The Troublesome Reign* does not mention the French invasion until its equivalent of Shakespeare's V.1. At IV.3.14–17 there is a possible reference to the landing of an advance French force.

power: Force of men, army.

111 *foreign preparation*: Military expedition abroad.

preparation: Five syllables.

112 *body*: Length and breadth.

113 *The copy of your speed is learned by them*: They have learned to emulate the speed (in military affairs) which you showed. The tables have been turned on John, and from this point his fortunes dwindle rapidly. (On John's speed of action in the early part of the play see [note to I.1.25](#).)

114 *when you should*: When you might have expected to.

115 *comes*: The singular verb is normal in Shakespeare after 'news', 'tidings', etc.

they are all arrived: (1) All of them have landed or (2) they are already present.

116 *intelligence*: In the military sense: sources of information, spies.

117–19 *Where is my mother's care ... not hear of it*: The expression is inverted and elliptical: 'In view of the fact that such an army could be mustered in France without my mother's hearing of it, it may well be asked what has happened to her usual diligence.'

- 119–20 *her ear* | *Is stopped with dust*: The messenger again answers in literal terms (cf. 110); Queen Eleanor did not *hear* (119) because her *ear* is stopped up with dust.
- 120–23 *The first of April ... Three days before*: In *The Troublesome Reign* the death of Constance is not mentioned and John only briefly refers to the death of his mother. Holinshed records Queen Eleanor's death in 1204, but does not report Constance's (which in fact took place in 1201, before the death of Arthur). Shakespeare's linking of the women in death accords with the balance of their rivalry in life in earlier scenes (see [second note to I.1.32](#)).
- 120–21 *The first of April died* | *Your noble mother*: Shakespeare gets the date of Queen Eleanor's death precisely right, though no published source for this is known to have been available to him. Honigsmann suggests that Shakespeare had access to the manuscript Wakefield Chronicle, which gives the information; Dover Wilson thinks that Shakespeare hits on the date purely by chance, subtracting a few days from the date of 10 April which (in the next scene of *The Troublesome Reign*) is twice referred to as the day for the barons' meeting at Bury St Edmunds. A third possibility has also been suggested: on the same page as Holinshed records the death of Queen Eleanor, he has an account of the eastern and northern sky turning fiery red on 1 April 1204: such celestial appearances often serve to presage death or disaster, though Holinshed does not make the connection in this instance. Dover Wilson is concerned to prove that Shakespeare never went beyond *The Troublesome Reign*; that he did so at some points, however, is clear (see [the Appendix](#)). This may well be one of them, but certainty on the matter is impossible.
- 122 *frenzy*: Fit of grief and rage (the mood in which we last saw her at III.4.105).
- 125 *Withhold thy speed, dreadful occasion*: Let this terrible series of events not run on so fast! John's incapacity to cope with the *speed* of events recalls 113.
- 126 *make a league*: Agree to cease hostilities. (John asks fate or fortune (*occasion*) to give him some respite from attack.)
pleased: Appeased, satisfied.
- 127 *What! Mother dead*: John questions disbelievingly (cf. his stunned exclamation at 181 below). Apart from one brief moment in the battle (III.2), this is his first appearance without his mother, and it marks the beginning of his collapse.

- 128 *How wildly then walks my estate in France*: In what a dangerous and chaotic state my affairs in France are now! At III.3.1–2 Eleanor had been left in charge of John's French possessions – though at II.1.487–9 he had given away all his lands in France. (See [note to II.1.487–9](#) on Shakespeare's exaggeration.)
- 130 *thou for truth givest out*: You claim. John is reluctant to give unqualified credence to the messenger's report.
givest: One syllable.
- 131 *Peter of Pomfret*: Holinshed records the prophecy in 1213 of 'an hermit, whose name was Peter, dwelling about York' (*Pomfret* being Pontefract in Yorkshire), that John would lose his Crown by Ascension Day. He then reports Peter's execution, along with his son, noting the alleged unfairness of it because John's surrender to Pandulph in that year was seen by some as a fulfilment of the prophecy. *The Troublesome Reign* expands the Holinshed material, bringing in Peter to interpret the five moons (see [note to 182–4](#)) before his Ascension Day prophecy, and bringing him back in a later scene (the equivalent of Shakespeare's V.1) to repeat the prophecy immediately before John's surrender of his crown to Pandulph. In giving Peter only one line in this scene (and only referring to him in V.1) Shakespeare speeds up the action without losing anything of substance, and allows Peter to become part of the general sense of panic surrounding John's decline. (Another possible source here is Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, which treats Peter as 'an idle gadder-about, and a prattling merchant'. See [also note to 144](#).)
- 131–2 *Thou hast made me giddy* | *With these ill tidings*: John turns from the messenger to the Bastard, who has just appeared, offering, in his bewilderment, a vague explanation for not greeting him at once.
- 132–3 *what says the world* | *To your proceedings*: How has your mission prospered? John emphasizes *your* in the hope of hearing better news from the Bastard than he has just heard from the messenger.
- 135–6 *But if you be afeard ... fall on your head*: If you are afraid to listen now, then you must expect disastrous consequences to overtake you unawares. There seems to be an understood clause: 'There is more bad news, but if ...' The Bastard speaks sharply, and his rebuke rouses John into an effort at self-composure. The threatening tone continues at 165–6 below, and at V.1.35–43.
- 137 *amazed*: Bewildered, overwhelmed (much stronger than the

present sense).

138 *tide*: Of bad news; possibly picking up *tidings* in 132.

139 *Aloft the flood*: Above the surface of the waves (continuing the *tide* metaphor).

141 *sped*: Fared, succeeded.

143 *travelled*: The F spelling *trauail'd* suggests a possible sub-meaning of 'laboured, struggled'. (The words 'travel' and 'travail' were not distinct at this time.)

144 *find*: (Historic present) found.

strangely fantasied: Full of strange fancies. In *The Troublesome Reign* we learn that the commons 'throng' to Peter (I.1520), and Holinshed refers to the 'great credit' in which Peter was held. Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* provides the fullest parallel to the mood here: 'old gossips' tales went abroad, new tales were invented, fables were added to fables, and lies grew upon lies' – all springing from 'this fantastical prophet'.

147 *prophet*: Perhaps sarcastic: a man who claims to have prophetic power.

151–2 *ere the next Ascension Day at noon*, | *Your highness should deliver up your crown*: Both Foxe and Holinshed report the Ascension Day prophecy, but only *The Troublesome Reign* names the hour of its fulfilment: 'ere Ascension Day | Have brought the sun unto his usual height' (I.1637–8). At Peter's next appearance in the source play, however, noon has become midnight (II.120–21 and 134). Shakespeare restores consistency in referring again to noon at V.1.26.

158 *safety*: Safe-keeping, custody.

159 *I must use thee*: I have work for you to do.

gentle: (1) Noble or (2) comfort-bringing.

160 *Hearest*: One syllable.

161 *men's mouths are full of it*: There's talk of nothing else.

162 *Lord Bigot*: Roger Bigot, second Earl of Norfolk. Though he appears in *The Troublesome Reign*, he is not there one of the three ringleaders of the rebellion. His place is supplied in the anonymous play by Essex, with no indication that this is a different Essex from the one presented in the opening scene. It seems possible that Shakespeare's alteration is an indication of his care: in 1213 Holinshed reports the death of Geoffrey Fitzpeter, Earl of Essex, a noble always loyal to John (see [fourth note to I.1.0](#)). The title passed to Geoffrey de Mandeville, who is prominent in the chronicle account of the Magna Carta

- movement. Shakespeare's substitution of Bigot avoids the possibility of confusion between the two Earls of Essex.
- 163 *eyes as red as new-enkindled fire*: Eyes aflame with rage. The linking of eyes and fire may recall the scene of Arthur's threatened blinding which we have just witnessed.
- 165 *is killed tonight*: Was killed last night.
- 165–6 *killed tonight* | *On your suggestion*: There is here a strong element of questioning, even of accusation, which John rather conspicuously ignores.
- 167 *thrust thyself into their companies*: Join these men whether they wish it or not.
- 168 *I have a way*: We never learn what this is. John at this time still thinks Arthur is dead; when he sends Hubert to regain the barons' allegiance at 260–69, he believes that Arthur is alive. (It is possible that some embryonic allusion to Holinshed's account of John's concessions in Magna Carta is to be discerned in this line. See note to 43–6 above.)
- 170 *The better foot before*: (Proverbial) go as fast as you can.
- 171 *subject enemies*: Enemies among my own subjects (in contrast with the *adverse* (hostile) *foreigners* of the following line).
- 173 *stout*: Bold, resolute.
- 174 *Be Mercury, set feathers to thy heels*: Mercury, the messenger of the gods, was customarily depicted with winged sandals.
- 175 *like thought*: With the speed of thought (proverbial).
- 176 *The spirit of the time shall teach me speed*: I shall be as speedy as this time of emergency requires.
- 177 *sprightful*: Spirited, brave.
- 181 *My mother dead*: John returns to contemplation of news which has deeply affected him (cf. 127 above).
- 182–4 *five moons ... in wondrous motion*: Holinshed records this event in 1200. *The Troublesome Reign* presents the five moons onstage, and has Peter of Pomfret offering a detailed interpretation which includes the assertion that the fifth moon is England seeking 'to shun the edicts of the Pope' (I.1616–29). Shakespeare wisely omits all this, and the phenomenon becomes just one of the astronomical irregularities predicted by Pandulph at III.4.153–9. His insistence that these things will be *natural* (153), and made portentous only by the people's fear, should be in our minds here.
- 184 *wondrous*: Unbelievable, giving cause for wonderment.
- 185 *beldams*: Old women, crones.

- 186 *prophesy upon it dangerously*: (1) Predict future danger from these signs or (2) expound these signs in a manner which is dangerous (the fact that such rumour is rife being dangerous to the state).
- 187 *Arthur's death is common in their mouths*: Talk of Arthur's death is widespread. Hubert is fulfilling his intention (expressed at IV.1.128) of spreading rumours of Arthur's death. The fact that he announces his death in public in *The Troublesome Reign*, and is immediately believed by the assembled lords, obviates the need to present John with this picture of unrest in the country. The lines seem to be influenced directly by Holinshed, who reports the effects of Hubert's false news of Arthur's death: 'For the space of fifteen days this rumour incessantly ran through both the realms of England and France, and there was ringing for him through towns and villages, as it had been for his funerals.'
- 190 *gripe the hearer's wrist*: In the excitement of telling the story, and the anxiety of discussing a politically dangerous subject.
- 191 *fearful action*: Gestures revealing fear.
action: Three syllables.
- 193 *thus*: Presumably poised in mid-air. The actor will make this clear.
- 195 *swallowing*: Eagerly taking in.
- 197–8 *which his nimble haste ... contrary feet*: Which, in his impetuous anxiety (to go out to hear the news), he had put on the wrong way round (the left slipper on the right foot). This lively and telling image mystified the eighteenth-century editors (Dr Johnson suggesting that Shakespeare meant gloves, not slippers), for at that time shoes were made to fit either foot.
- 198 *contrary*: Accented on the second syllable.
- 199 *a many thousand*: Many thousands of.
- 200 *embattailèd and ranked*: Established in well-ordered battle positions.
in Kent: *The Troublesome Reign*, following Holinshed, also reports Kent as the place of landing (II.328–32), though at a later point in the action than Shakespeare (see headnote to this scene).
- 201 *artificer*: Workman, artisan.
- 202 *Cuts off his tale*: Interrupts his story.
- 203 *seekest*: One syllable.
possess me with these fears: (1) Give me this fearful information or (2) make me share the fearful attitudes you have described.
- 204 *Why urgest thou so oft young Arthur's death*: The answer is

clear enough to the audience (see note to 187 above).

205 *a mighty cause*: A most powerful reason.

207 *No had*: Had I not.

208–41 *It is the curse ... vile to name*: The frequent reference in these lines to the interview between John and Hubert in III.3, though John's intention is to unsay what was there said, seems to reassert his responsibility for Arthur's alleged death. Much of the effect of these lines will depend upon the manner of playing in III.3.

209–14 *By slaves that take ... advised respect*: There is no real equivalent for these lines in *The Troublesome Reign*, and Shakespeare may again be directly influenced by Holinshed, who reports that one of Hubert's reasons for hesitation over killing Arthur was his belief that John's order was given 'only in his heat and fury ... and that afterwards, upon better advisement, he would ... repent himself'. In Shakespeare's play, however, as in *The Troublesome Reign*, there is the concrete reality of the *warrant* for Hubert's action.

209–10 *take their humours ... house of life*: Take a king's passing whim as the authority for murder. John's reference to a *warrant* ironically foreshadows Hubert's showing the incriminating document at 215 below.

210 *the bloody house of life*: The human body, containing blood, or made bloody by murder.

211–14 *And on the winking ... advised respect*: And, on the slightest hint from someone in authority (or, possibly, when authority slumbers), take it upon themselves to interpret a law or understand the intentions of an angry king when probably his state of mind is due more to a passing whim than to deliberate consideration.

215 *hand*: Signature.

216 *the last account 'twixt heaven and earth*: The Day of Judgement.

218 *Witness against us to damnation*: Provide evidence that will condemn us to damnation. The line derives from *The Troublesome Reign*, where the sight of the warrant leads John to declare that through it 'both our souls | Have sold their freedom to the thrall of hell' (I.1719–20). The idea of John's *damnation* is further explored in his death scene (see [note to V.7.24](#)).

us: Interestingly ambiguous: John may refer to himself alone (the 'royal we'), or to himself and Hubert. The former seems more likely: his thoughts in this scene are nothing if not self-centred.

damnation: Four syllables.

219–20 *How oft the sight ... Make deeds ill done*: How often our perception of an opportunity to commit sin causes us to succumb!

220 *Make*: Plural verb after singular subject, influenced by the interposition of plural *means* (219) between subject (*sight*) and verb.

by: On hand, present.

221–2 *A fellow ... deed of shame*: One whose physical appearance clearly singles him out as a man likely to commit a crime. John's descent to remarks on Hubert's ugliness is further evidence of his degeneration; he later makes himself rather absurd by having (partially at least) to withdraw them (263–6).

222 *Quoted*: (1) Marked (as a passage might be marked in the margin of a book) or (2) set down, as in writing.

signed: (1) Marked distinctively (as with the 'sign' of Cain) or (2) bearing nature's signature (which is thus thought of as confirming what it has set down or *quoted*).

226 *liable*: Suitable.

danger: Dangerous in its results rather than its carrying out.

227 *faintly broke with thee*: Let fall a hint to you, broached the subject very gingerly. John's account of the interview which we witnessed in III.3 is so far accurate.

229 *Made it no conscience*: Had no qualms of conscience.

231 *but shook thy head or made a pause*: Hubert's behaviour in the scene to which John refers is discussed above (see [notes to III.3.56–8](#), [64–5](#) and [66](#)). The effect of what John says here will depend on the actor's interpretation at these points.

234 *As bid*: As if to bid.

express: Clear, direct (accented on the first syllable).

There is throughout an element of truth in John's account of the furtive interview. The fact remains, however, that complete agreement was reached, and that John has since put his intentions on to a written warrant.

236 *those thy fears might have wrought fears in me*: Your doubts and scruples might have induced similar feelings on my part. Dr Johnson comments aptly: 'These reproaches vented against Hubert are not the words of art or policy, but the eruptions of a mind swelling with consciousness of a crime, and desirous of discharging its misery on another.'

238 *in signs again parley with sin*: Hubert's *He shall not live* (III.3.66) was, in fact, perfectly direct and unequivocal. There is a

- quibble here on *signs/sin*.
- 239 *stop*: Hesitation, pause.
- 240 *rude*: Rough, savage.
- 241 *held vile to name*: Thought too wicked and horrible to speak of.
- 243 *my state is braved*: My government is challenged and defied.
- 244 *Even at my gates*: John imagines his dominion as a city, with an invading army at the gates. The image recalls the situation of Angiers in II.1.
- 245 *in the body of this fleshly land*: Within my own body (frequently thought of as a little world, a microcosm of the physical universe; chaos in the state is reflected by chaos in the ruler's soul).
- 246 *confine of blood and breath*: Territory enclosing blood and breath within its frontiers.
- 247–8 *civil tumult reigns ... my cousin's death*: I am at war within myself over my satisfaction at having Arthur out of the way and the hostility to the deed which my conscience provokes. The image recalls Salisbury's observation at 76–8 above.
- 247 *reigns*: Singular verb after plural subject, *Hostility* and *tumult* constituting a single idea.
- 248 *cousin*: Arthur.
- 252 *maiden*: Unblemished, unstained.
- 254–5 *Within this bosom never ... a murderous thought*: This is something of an exaggeration, as III.3.66 and much of IV.1 make clear.
- 255 *motion*: Impulse, inclination.
- 256 *slandered nature in my form*: Slandered my nature (unjustly accused me of inhumanity) in abusing my physical appearance.
- 257 *howsoever rude exteriorly*: Whatever its outward imperfections.
- 259 *Than to be*: The expression is elliptical: 'than one which would be capable of being'.
- 260 *Doth Arthur live? O, haste thee to the peers*: John's delight is only for the political advantage he thinks this news will bring him. (Cf. 103 above.)
- 261–2 *Throw this report ... tame to their obedience*: Tell them this and thereby calm their anger and recall them to the obedience which is due from them.
- 263 *passion*: Anger, disturbed and tense state of mind.
- 264 *feature*: Physical appearance.
- 265–6 *foul imaginary eyes ... than thou art*: (1) The fact that I saw

you through eyes bloodshot with misplaced rage blinded me (as at 264) into believing you more ugly than you are *or* (2) what I imagined to be a look of murderous guilt on your face made you seem more ugly than you are. The preceding line seems to make the first meaning more probable. Since all talk in this scene has been of Arthur's death rather than his blinding, the suggestion that the reference is to Arthur's eyes (*bloody* empty sockets to John's *imaginary* view) seems unlikely.

266 *more*: Even more. John's almost absurd retraction of his earlier abuse seems less than complete: the word *hideous* is still strong.

267 *closet*: Private room.

269 *conjure*: Entreat, urge.

but slowly: John has, of course, been speaking quickly and excitedly.

The scene follows on immediately from IV.2: the Bastard enters at 20 with a reference to his previous meeting with the nobles (mentioned at IV.2.162), and repeats the King's command (given at IV.2.169) that they come before him at once; at 104, Hubert, also fulfilling a mission given in the preceding scene, reveals that all three scenes (IV.1, 2 and 3) are to be imagined as occurring within an hour of each other. The historical impossibility of this time-scheme – at IV.2.115, 200, for example, Lewis has just landed in Kent, while at IV.3.11, 114 he is waiting to meet the nobles at Bury St Edmunds – will not be noticed in the theatre, where attention will be focused on the speed of events, and the reactions of the nobles and the Bastard to them.

The material for the scene comes mainly from the opening scene of Part II of *The Troublesome Reign*. Shakespeare follows the anonymous play in presenting in the same scene the death of Arthur and the nobles' plans to meet at Bury St Edmunds. This meeting occurred in 1214; Holinshed treats Arthur's death under 1202, though making it clear that it happened a little later. But he also reports the French defence of their invasion of England in 1216 on the grounds that John, by his murder of Arthur, had forfeited his right to the English crown: there are thus some historical grounds, as well as excellent dramatic reasons, for linking the invasion with Arthur's death.

Shakespeare follows *The Troublesome Reign* in showing Arthur dying during an attempted escape. A number of possible explanations for his death are offered by Holinshed: 'Some have written that as he essayed to have escaped out of prison, and proving to climb over the walls of the castle [of Rouen], he fell into the river of Seine and so was drowned. Other write that through very grief and languor he pined away and died of natural sickness. But some affirm that King John secretly caused him to be murdered and made away. So as it is not thoroughly agreed upon in what sort he finished his days; but verily King John was had in great suspicion, whether worthily or not the Lord knoweth.' The choice of the accidental form of death (slightly modified) from among these possibilities is important in preserving the climate of ambiguity in the play's presentation of political morality. The sense of mystery in Holinshed's account also remains, to some extent, in Shakespeare: no one but the

audience really knows what happens to Arthur, and the Bastard's realization of this (at 57–9) helps to establish his good sense and dependability in our eyes.

Shakespeare makes a number of interesting departures from the equivalent scene of *The Troublesome Reign*. He has the lords enter already discussing their forthcoming alliance with the Dauphin, and he delays their discovery of Arthur's corpse. In the source play no mention is made of an alliance with the Dauphin until after the discovery of Arthur's body. In Shakespeare the discovery of Arthur's corpse serves only to strengthen, not to form, the lords' resolve to ally themselves with the French invaders; their action is thus made more obviously reprehensible, and their equivocal position becomes clear in V.2. Even in the present scene, however, it is sharply contrasted by Shakespeare with that of the Bastard. The Bastard does not appear at all in the equivalent scene of *The Troublesome Reign*; in Shakespeare's scene his calmness in the crisis, his protection of Hubert, his search for truth, and his final self-dedication to loyalty, in alliance with Hubert, are a turning point in his development and thus in the development of the play. That all this has been added by Shakespeare is an indication of its importance to his conception of the play's overall design.

- 0 *on the walls*: This scene, like II.1 (before Angiers), again makes use of the upper stage to represent walls.
- 3 *There's few*: Singular verb with plural subject, as commonly when subject follows verb.
few or none do know me: The scene is set in England (see [headnote to IV.1](#)); Arthur has been brought up in France.
- 4 *ship-boy's semblance*: Disguise as a sailor-boy. There is no precedent for this in *The Troublesome Reign*, and Shakespeare's addition of it provides a small but vivid theatrical touch. (It may also be a further indication that he thinks of Arthur imprisoned in the Tower: in that area of London a ship-boy would easily have passed unnoticed.)
- 7 *shifts*: Ways, stratagems (perhaps with a pun on *shifts* as changes of clothing, following on from his disguise).
- 8 *As good to die and go as die and stay*: It is as good to die in trying to escape as stay here where death is inevitable.
- 9–10 *O me ... England keep my bones*: Arthur's pathetic couplet replaces his fifteen lines of rhetorical lament in *The Troublesome Reign*, lines which do not, however, include the idea of John's

spirit being in the *stones* that kill Arthur. Shakespeare is focusing our attention on the moral complexity of the situation – though Arthur’s death is an accident, it fulfils John’s wishes – rather than drawing out our emotional sympathy for the dying boy.

9 *spirit*: One syllable: ‘sprite’.

10 *Heaven take my soul, and England keep my bones*: The line recalls the usual formula with which Elizabethan wills begin. Arthur’s body lies undiscovered for more than twenty lines, a stark comment on the political debate which now takes over.

Bigot: See [note to IV.2.162](#).

11 *I will meet him*: Even as Salisbury enters, we are made aware that the scheme of rebellion is already laid out; the conspiratorial vagueness of *him* (we learn at 16 that it refers to the Dauphin) immediately sets the atmosphere of a plot.

Saint Edmundsbury: Bury St Edmunds (in Suffolk). The shrine of St Edmund was a place of pilgrimage. Shakespeare’s compression of the material of his sources is here very conspicuous. Holinshed records a meeting of the barons at Bury in 1214, where they swore an oath to remain in warlike alliance until the King granted their demands. This was more than a year before their invitation to Lewis to invade England and their meeting him on his landing at Sandwich. There is no mention in the chronicle of Lewis’s ever going to Bury. In *The Troublesome Reign* the lords decide to invite the Dauphin into England after their discovery of Arthur’s body; they then plan to go to Bury ‘and on the altar there | Swear secrecy and aid to this advice’ (II.100–101). The reason for their choice of a sacred shrine as a place of meeting is thus clear. Because Shakespeare has brought forward the French invasion (to IV.2), the reason for holding the assembly at Bury is unexplained. At IV.2.200 we hear of the Dauphin’s taking up a position in Kent, but not until V.1.30–32 do we learn of his conquest of Kent and London. Yet in the present line the suggestion is that he is already in Suffolk, and the point is repeated more firmly at 114. (These discrepancies would not be noticeable in the theatre, where the nobles’ conspiratorial tone and readiness to treat with an invading army – all this before their discovery of Arthur’s body, lying visible to the audience – would dominate.)

12–13 *It is our safety ... the perilous time*: It is our only safe course, and we must take advantage of so favourable an offer at this dangerous time. The suggestion that the offer of alliance has come from the Dauphin completely reverses the nobles’ invitation

to him which *The Troublesome Reign* presents. Holinshed suggests that the invitation to Lewis was sent because the nobles were 'afflicted with so many mischiefs all at one time, as ... they knew not which way to turn them nor how to seek for relief ...

Therefore, considering they were in such extremity of despair, they resolved with themselves to seek for aid at the enemy's hands.' Since *The Troublesome Reign* makes no mention of the nobles' fears, these lines may be another instance of the direct influence of the chronicle on Shakespeare.

- 14–17 *Who brought that letter ... these lines import*: We never learn the contents of the letter from Pandulph (*the Cardinal*). It has apparently helped to urge the lords into rebellion and may be related to the 'holy charge that we received from Rome' which the lords mention in *The Troublesome Reign* as one of their reasons for inviting the Dauphin's invasion. We last saw Pandulph in France in III.4, and are here presumably asked to imagine Melun as the bearer of Pandulph's letter from France to England. Holinshed in fact mentions an advance French force, with Melun as one of its leaders, arriving three months before the main expedition. Since there is no equivalent in *The Troublesome Reign* for this preliminary contact with Melun, the present reference may be another instance of Shakespeare's direct recourse to Holinshed.
- 15 *Count Melun*: Shakespeare follows *The Troublesome Reign* in individually identifying only one of several French leaders named by Holinshed; Melun's dramatic revelation of Lewis's plot against the English nobles, recorded in Holinshed (see [headnote to V.4](#)), explains the playwrights' interest in him. F spells the name *Meloone*, which indicates the contemporary pronunciation.
- 16–17 *Whose private with me ... these lines import*: Whose private communication to me shows the Dauphin's attitude to be more comprehensively friendly towards us than this letter suggests. Textual corruption at 16 is often suspected, and 'witness', 'notice', 'missive', are among the suggested replacements for *with me*. There is intentional wordplay between *private* and *general*.
- 20 *Two long days' journey*: Bury St Edmunds would be about two days on horseback from London, which Shakespeare probably thought of as the place of Arthur's imprisonment.
or ere: Before.
- 21 *Once more today*: The Bastard reports his earlier meeting with the nobles at IV.2.162–6.

distempered: Ill-humoured, angry.

22 *The King by me requests your presence straight*: The King has sent me (at IV.2.166–75) to ask you to go to him at once.

23 *The King hath dispossessed himself of us*: The King, through his own actions, has lost our allegiance.

24 *line*: Provide a lining for, strengthen, reinforce.

thin bestainèd cloak: The *cloak* of John's honour is thought of as worn and stained by his dishonourable behaviour.

25–6 *attend the foot ... where'er it walks*: Follow in the footsteps of (serve) a man whose actions constantly involve bloodshed.

27 *the worst*: Probably referring to the death of Arthur (as the Bastard's reply suggests), but possibly implying defiance of 'the worst that the King can do against us'.

28 *good words ... were best*: It would be better to reply with courtesy.

29 *griefs*: Grievances may be implied, as well as sorrows.

reason: Control our conduct, do our reasoning for us. Play on the word *reason* follows in the Bastard's reply.

31 *'twere reason you had*: It would be sensible, wise, for you to have. The Bastard's verbal dexterity is an indication of his intellectual control of the situation.

32 *impatience hath his privilege*: Allowance has to be made for anger.

33 *no man else*: From the proverb 'Anger punishes itself'. F prints *mans* – an obvious mistake. Emendation to 'manners', allowing the Bastard another joke on Salisbury's line 29, has been suggested; but a *master/man* joke seems to be intended.

36 *The earth had not a hole to hide this deed*: The earth refused a grave to conceal this murder.

37–8 *Murder, as hating what himself hath done, | Doth lay it open to urge on revenge*: Murder, as though in hatred of the destruction it has wrought, exposes it to public view in order to incite vengeance.

39 *he*: Murder.

40 *too precious-princely for a grave*: The bodies of royalty were placed in monuments or vaults, not in graves, and this may be implied here. But the significant point is that murder has been too ashamed to inter, by any means, its innocent victim.

41 *Sir Richard*: Apart from the Bastard's own comic use of it at I.1.185, this is the only occasion in the play on which the Bastard's knightly title (given at I.1.160–62) is used. Salisbury's

courtesy suggests that he is anxious to enlist the Bastard's support.

You have beheld: Often emended to 'Have you beheld' and joined to the questions in the following lines. But the questions come more sharply when the Bastard has been taunted with what Salisbury takes to be undeniable evidence of John's guilt.

42–4 *Or have you read ... That you do see*: The syntax is clipped, and seems to take as understood a phrase such as 'anything like this'. *Or ... or* is a common Elizabethan idiom for 'Either ... or'. The lines might be paraphrased: 'Have you either read or heard (of anything like this), or could you either believe, or even begin to believe, what you see, although you do see it?'

44–5 *Could thought, without this object, | Form such another*: Without the clear evidence before you, could you conceive of such a sight as this?

46–7 *the crest, | Of murder's arms*: The reference is to the crest surmounting the shield in a coat of arms. Murder is imagined as bearing such a coat, with John's crime as a crest above the crest.

49 *wall-eyed*: With glaring eyes.

50 *Presented to the tears of soft remorse*: Offered as a sight to provoke the tears of gentle pity.

51 *do stand excused in this*: Are, in comparison with this, excusable.

52 *sole*: Unique.

54 *times*: Times to come.

56 *Exemplified by*: In comparison with.

57–9 *It is a damnèd ... work of any hand*: The Bastard's intuition of the truth of which only the audience is aware is important in establishing his dependability before the important later stages of the scene. (Cf. V.1.41 and note.)

58 *graceless*: Utterly lacking in virtue, damnable (stronger than the present sense).

heavy: Brutal, oppressive.

61 *light*: Foresight, inkling. Salisbury's claim to *light* immediately seeks to eclipse the glimmer of truth which the Bastard has revealed.

63 *practice*: Plan, plot.

64–72 *From whose obedience ... the worship of revenge*: Salisbury's vow is an unswearing of his oath of fealty to John, in ritual terms which emphasize its solemnity. He is obeying Pandulph's injunction at III.1.174–5 (perhaps repeated in the letter

mentioned at 14–17 above).

- 67 *The incense of a vow*: Salisbury imagines his vow as a religious ceremony offered up for Arthur like incense at an altar.
- 69 *infected with*: Corrupted by, deflected (from my purpose) by.
- 70 *conversant*: Having contact (accented on the first syllable).
- 71–2 *Till I have set a glory ... the worship of revenge*: The hand may be Salisbury's, uplifted or laid to his sword during the swearing of the oath. But it is to Arthur that the religious imagery of the speech is applied, so that the lines might better be taken to mean: 'till I have glorified the hand (of this dead prince), demonstrating my veneration by revenging his wrongs'.
- 73 *Enter Hubert*: In *The Troublesome Reign*, Hubert is onstage for only twenty-five lines, there are none of the insults and threats of the lords, and (because the Bastard does not appear in this scene of the anonymous play) no protection of him by the Bastard, with the subsequent excited questioning and final alliance.
- 74 *hot with haste*: Hubert has obviously obeyed the King's injunction at IV.2.267–9. Whether he fails to perceive Arthur's corpse until 103, and is previously entirely bewildered by the lords' attack on him, or whether he sees it at 76, so that his self-defence is motivated by consciousness of being falsely accused, is a decision to be made by the director.
- 77 *Avaunt*: Be gone! out of our sight! (a contemptuous term).
- 78 *Must I rob the law*: Must I (by killing you at once) deprive the law of a man it will surely condemn to death?
- 79 *Your sword is bright, sir; put it up again*: The Bastard takes control with impressive authority. The line is very like Othello's in similar circumstances: 'Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them' (I.2.59).
- 83 *forget yourself*: Forget your rank. A noble was not permitted by the laws of honour to challenge a commoner, or vice versa. The following lines depend upon this concept. Hubert is not of noble rank in the play, though this is a change from the historical sources.
- 84 *tempt*: Attempt, put to the test.
my true defence: (1) Justified self-defence or (2) the quality of my swordsmanship.
- 85–6 *Lest I, by marking of your rage ... your greatness, and nobility*: Lest I, conscious only of your fury, forget the great difference in rank between us.
- 87 *Darest*: One syllable.

- 88–9 *Not for my life ... against an emperor*: Hubert maintains his position: he would not defy the code of honour by challenging a man of noble birth, but, being challenged himself and his life in danger, he would defend his innocence even against a man of much higher rank than a noble.
- 90–91 *Do not prove me so; | Yet I am none*: Do not make me become one (by killing you); I am not one yet.
- 91–3 *Whose tongue soe'er speaks false ... Keep the peace, I say*: Hubert seems to measure his words: 'The man who speaks falsely (Salisbury, in his latest remark) does not speak the truth; the man who does not speak the truth is a liar.' For a man to call his social equal a liar demanded a challenge to a duel. But as a commoner Hubert is ignored in this claim to a duel; they will not kill him like a gentleman, but hack him to death. The Bastard again steps forward to defend true honour against its travesty.
- 94 *gall*: Wound, hurt.
Faulconbridge: Cf. 41 above; in the moment of truth, Salisbury has no time for the Bastard's knightly title. (See also 101.)
- 95 *devil*: Here, and at 100, the word seems to imply invincibility. (See also V.4.4, and II.1.135 and note.)
- 97 *teach thy hasty spleen to do me shame*: Allow your anger to insult me.
- 98 *betime*: At once.
- 99 *toasting-iron*: Sword – used contemptuously, 'iron' being a frequent colloquialism for sword.
- 101 *renownèd*: The source of the Bastard's 'renown' is presumably his role in the battle at Angiers in III.2.
- 104 *'Tis not an hour since I left him well*: Hubert refers to the conclusion to IV.1, when he left Arthur to give false news of the prince's death. In IV.2 we saw this news brought and later denied. That this is all imagined as occurring within an hour is evidence of Shakespeare's desire to maintain the tension and excitement of the plot.
- 106 *date*: Term, duration.
- 107 *cunning waters of his eyes*: Hypocritical tears.
- 108 *rheum*: Tears.
- 109 *traded*: Practised, expert.
- 112 *uncleanly*: Offensive, foul (stronger than the modern sense).
- 114 *Bury*: Bury St Edmunds.
- 117–18 *Beyond the infinite and boundless reach | Of mercy*: Perhaps alluding to Psalm 36:5: 'Thy mercy, O God, reacheth unto heaven

...

- 121 *black*: The traditional hue of damned souls, who were represented with blackened faces in the Mystery plays.
- 123 *ugly*: The allusion is to the hideous faces of the damned in paintings of the Last Judgement (though again it draws attention to Hubert's ugliness).
- 125 *If thou didst but consent*: If you did not do the deed yourself, but were only a party to it.
- 126 *do but despair*: There remains for you only the total despair of being deprived of hope of salvation. In such circumstances, as the Bastard goes on to say, suicide is the obvious course.
- 127 *wantest*: Lack (one syllable).
- 132 *ocean*: Three syllables.
- 135 *act, consent, or sin of thought*: To the Bastard's accusations of his having sinned in deed (118) and word (125), Hubert adds a denial that he has even sinned in thought – a rather dubious denial (cf. IV.2.254–5 and note). The formula is that of the general confession before Holy Communion: '... our manifold sins and wickedness ... by thought, word, and deed, against Thy divine majesty' (*Book of Common Prayer*).
- 138 *Let hell want pains enough*: May there not be enough pains in hell (possibly echoing Psalm 116:3: 'the pains of hell took hold on me').
- 139–59 *Go, bear him ... frown upon the land*: The Bastard closes the act with a speech of concern for the national security. He was absent from the play at the end of Act III, and this speech is a measure of his development since his lines brought Act II to a conclusion. (His closing lines to Act V will show him to have developed even further.)
- 140 *amazed*: Bewildered, lost (in a maze) (stronger than the present meaning).
- 141 *thorns*: Snares, dangers.
- 142, 145 *England ... England*: From contemplating the fate of Arthur (*England* at 142) the Bastard begins to consider the fate of the nation (*England* at 145).
- 144 *The life, the right and truth, of all this realm*: The words refer both to Arthur himself (whose *right* to the throne the Bastard has just acknowledged), and also to law, order and loyalty, which have deserted the nation and its ruler not only because of Arthur's death, but also because of the French invasion and the baronial revolt. The speed with which the Bastard turns to these wider

implications of Arthur's death is important.

146 *scamble*: Scramble, struggle.

part by th'teeth: Tear at (as a pack of dogs).

147 *The unowed interest of proud-swelling state*: (1) The vacant (unowned) title of monarch, with all its pomp or (2) the duty and obedience due to the king but at present accruing, like *interest*, because not owed to anyone (since there is no rightful king).

148 *the bare-picked bone of majesty*: Continuing the metaphor of dogs from 146. *majesty* is *bare-picked* presumably because of the paucity of majestic quality in the present occupant of the throne.

149 *doggèd*: Fierce, cruel.

crest: (1) Hackles (of the dog) or (2) armorial crest, in a coat of arms, raised for battle in the oncoming war.

151–2 *powers from home ... in one line*: Armies from abroad (the Dauphin and his troops) and discontented men in England (the nobles) come together in one army.

152 *vast*: Undefined (as well as 'huge').

confusion: Chaos, panic (stronger than the present meaning).

153 *As doth a raven on a sick-fallen beast*: Like a raven waiting (in the expectation of carrion food) for the death of a diseased animal.

fallen: F spells *falne*, and the metre requires the slight elision. But see [note to I.1.9–10](#).

154 *The imminent decay of wrested pomp*: The certain, swift collapse of royal authority snatched from its holder. The Bastard may predict the collapse of John's régime, *wrested* from Arthur's rightful claim, or the anarchy likely to follow the usurpation of John's position by the Dauphin and the rebellious nobles. The ambiguity is appropriate to a time of *vast confusion* which threatens temporarily to overwhelm even the Bastard.

155–6 *Now happy he whose cloak and ceinture can | Hold out this tempest*: Recalling Psalm 109:19: 'Let it be unto him as the garment that he is wrapped in, and as the girdle that he is always girdled withal.'

155 *ceinture*: Belt, girdle (a rare form of 'cincture').

157 *I'll to the King*: In spite of his doubts, the Bastard recognizes that support of the man who occupies the throne represents the only hope of peace.

158 *brief in hand*: Waiting for urgent attention.

The ambiguous time-scheme continues here. The Dauphin, who at IV.2.115 and 200 was described as just arrived in Kent, but who at 11 and 114 of IV.3 (a scene taking place, we are told, within the same hour) was already at Bury St Edmunds, is now not quite so far north: he is reported to have conquered Kent and taken London (30–32). The present scene is imagined on the one hand as occurring immediately after IV.3: the Bastard has arrived to report directly to the King the failure of his mission to the nobles (33) and the death of Arthur which has just been discovered (39). On the other hand, the Ascension Day mentioned in the prophecy at IV.2.151–2 (where there was no suggestion that it would fall on the morrow) has now arrived; so too has Pandulph, whom we last saw in France in III.4. The historical events of the scene come, according to Holinshed, from the eve of Ascension Day 1213 (John's surrender to Pandulph) and the early summer of 1216 (Lewis's advance and the siege of Dover Castle).

Shakespeare here combines material from two scenes of *The Troublesome Reign*, which are there separated by the meeting at Bury St Edmunds (Shakespeare's V.2). Shakespeare's omissions are revealing. The earlier scene in the source play begins with the reappearance of Peter of Pomfret and the repetition of his prophecies. This is followed by the arrival of Hubert with a factually accurate account of Arthur's death. Then comes the Bastard with the news of the Dauphin's impending invasion and of the planned meeting at Bury St Edmunds. Finally John reveals that he has heard of his mother's death. All this forces him into a powerful statement of the miseries of his country, with the assertion that 'The Pope of Rome, 'tis he that is the cause' (II.267); surrender to Pandulph is seen as the last resort in these circumstances. But this surrender will only be a sham: 'Then, John, there is no way to keep thy crown | But finely to dissemble with the Pope' (II.274–5). Even after this, *The Troublesome Reign* shows John's further hesitation when he learns that the price of Pandulph's assistance is the surrender of the English crown to Rome. At this moment news is brought of the Dauphin's arrival off the coast of Kent, and it becomes clear that John's only chance is to give in to the papal legate. The actual surrender of the crown is not portrayed; after an intervening Bury scene, a new scene begins with Pandulph returning John's crown to him.

Shakespeare shows no concern to offer a Protestant justification for John. He has already brought forward two of the

motives for surrender (Queen Eleanor's death and the Dauphin's arrival) to IV.2, and here he begins his scene with John on his knees (metaphorically at least, but probably physically also) before Pandulph, with no excuses and no explanation for the surrender. John's shameful and apparently voluntary act is followed by the irresponsible callousness of his recall of Peter of Pomfret's prophecy. The prophet himself does not appear. After this undermining of John's plausibility as a king, the Bastard enters, replacing Hubert as the bearer of the news of Arthur's death. At 30–36 the Bastard reports on the state of the country, as he does in *The Troublesome Reign*; otherwise his role is virtually unrecognizable from its origin in the anonymous play. In the first of the two source scenes, he seems at one point to be about to desert John and join the nobles; in the second a parley directly between John and the Dauphin is followed by a few lines of encouragement to John from the Bastard (II.710–18). In bringing these forward, and expanding them into the two long speeches (43–61 and 65–76) in which the Bastard shows that he alone now has the capacity to lead the defence of England, Shakespeare reveals his intentions. In the following scene the Bastard will replace John in the parley with the enemy; here, in a line for which *The Troublesome Reign* has no equivalent, the situation is made plain: *Have thou the ordering of this present time* (77).

- 1–2 *giving the crown to Cardinal Pandulph ... returning the crown*: These directions are not in F, and only the second is definitely required by what is spoken. But Shakespeare's removal of much of the material which, in *The Troublesome Reign*, brings John to a position where he must give in, and the omission of Pandulph's demand for the crown, make the physical demonstration of the handing over of the crown necessary if the audience is to realize what is at stake.
I ... my: The singular form is rarely used by John; he returns to the royal plural after Pandulph has given him back the crown (7 ff.).
- 2 *The circle of my glory*: The crown, symbol of regality.
- 3 *as holding of*: As a leasehold, a tenure, from.
- 5 *holy word*: (1) Solemn promise or (2) word as an allegedly holy man. John's following remarks indicate the nature of Pandulph's promises.
- 6 *his holiness*: The Pope. John speaks with a careful respect very different from the views he expressed in III.1.

- 7 *inflamed*: Engulfed with the fire of rebellion.
- 8 *counties*: Either shires or nobles (counts); probably the latter is intended, to contrast with *people* in the following line.
- 9 *quarrel with obedience*: Refuse to submit to authority.
- 10 *love of soul*: Deepest love, fullest loyalty.
- 11 *stranger*: Foreign.
- 12–13 *This inundation ... to be qualified*: You alone can cure the ills which at present beset this nation. The comparison between the political state and the human body, the macrocosm and the microcosm, recalls IV.2.245–6. The medical imagery continues in the next three lines.
- 12 *inundation*: Unhealthy preponderance (of one of the four humours in the body).
- mistempered*: Disordered, diseased.
- 13 *qualified*: Assuaged, restored to balance.
- 14 *time*: State of affairs.
- 15 *medicine*: The elision required by the metre is reflected in the F spelling, *medcine*.
- 16 *overthrow*: Of my government.
- 17 *It was my breath*: (Cf. III.4.127 and V.2.83.) Pandulph refers to his general role in III.1 and III.4.
- 19 *convertite*: Man newly converted.
- 21 *blustering*: (1) Buffeted (by the wind of rebellion) or (2) turbulent (buffeting its ruler with rebellion and lawlessness).
- 25–9 *Did not the prophet ... it is but voluntary*: The prediction of Peter of Pomfret at IV.2.151–2 is now fulfilled. The brief reference here replaces Peter's reappearance in *The Troublesome Reign*. Shakespeare's more economical treatment works better: we are still reminded of Peter's prediction, but John's casual aside also serves to reveal the King's increasingly obvious collapse and contrasts with the Bastard's indignation at 65–76.
- 28 *on constraint*: By force, coercion.
- 30–32 *All Kent hath yielded ... the Dauphin and his powers*: The rapid French advance has followed the landing in Kent reported at IV.2.110–15 and 200. The Dauphin's success is described in similar terms in *The Troublesome Reign*:

Where'er they [the French] set their foot, all places yield;
 Thy land is theirs, and not a foot holds out
 But Dover Castle, which is hard besieged. (II.644–6)

The French siege of Dover Castle figures prominently in

Holinshed's account, though neither dramatist follows the chronicle in making Hubert de Burgh the captain of the castle.

32 *powers*: Troops.

33 *will not hear you*: The Bastard is reporting the failure of the missions given to himself at IV.2.170–75 and to Hubert at IV.2.260–69.

35 *wild amazement*: Terrified bewilderment, panic (stronger than the present sense). The Bastard echoes his description of his own feelings at the end of the preceding scene (IV.3.140), and his slightly threatening tone recalls his previous interview with John (IV.2.135–6 and 165–6).

hurries up and down: (1) Spreads like wildfire through or (2) hurries them up and down, makes them rush pointlessly about.

36 *The little number of your doubtful friends*: The emphasis is on the adjectives; the Bastard is facing John with the seriousness of his position.

doubtful: (1) Uncertain, not entirely trustworthy or (2) doubting, apprehensive. The Bastard seems almost to number himself in this category.

40 *casket*: Possibly playing on *cast* in the preceding line.

41 *By some damned hand*: The Bastard has apparently changed his mind from IV.3.57–9, where he realized that Arthur's death, though *a damnèd ... work*, might not be *the work of any hand*. He now seems to believe that Arthur was murdered, though he is convinced (43) that Hubert was in no way responsible. The undertone of suspicion towards John means that the word *damned* has peculiar force. (On the question of John's 'damnation', see [note to V.7.24](#).) In *The Troublesome Reign* Hubert's straightforward account of Arthur's fall from the castle walls during an attempted escape is exactly what the audience has observed (II.147–51); Shakespeare's alteration preserves the sense of mystery about Arthur's death, leaving the audience in sole possession of the truth.

43 *So, on my soul, he did, for aught he knew*: This is the first verbal indication of the Bastard's acceptance of Hubert's denial at IV.3.135–9 (though an actor could certainly show some visible sign of credence at that point).

he knew: The pronoun is emphasized: the Bastard suggests that others (perhaps implying John himself) may have known more.

44 *But wherefore do you droop*: the Bastard from this point drops the tone of concealed accusation and begins to plan future action.

John's failure to respond makes their relative positions clear.

46 *distrust*: Lack of confidence, fear.

48 *Be stirring as the time*: Be as active and energetic as the present state of affairs requires.

be fire with fire: Show fiery quality yourself in confronting the fire that assails you. The image of fire answering fire recalls the threats which close III.1. Ironically, on the next occasion we see John, he is 'burned up' by fever (V.3.14).

49–50 *the brow* | *Of bragging horror*: The bold front of the men who threaten terror (that is, the invaders and the rebels).

51 *borrow their behaviours from*: Copy the manners of.

53 *spirit*: One syllable: 'sprite'.

resolution: Five syllables.

54 *the god of war*: Mars – though the allusion must be very vaguely intended.

55 *become*: Adorn, honour (with his presence).

field: Battlefield.

56 *aspiring*: Buoyantly hopeful.

57 *the lion in his den*: The English King in his own kingdom. The general allusion is to the lion-like qualities hoped for in any English king, who bore the lion in his coat of arms. But in this play any allusion to lions may recall Richard Coeur-de-lion. The picture of Coeur-de-lion's son, perhaps wearing his lion-skin (see [second note to III.2.0](#)), vainly trying to rally Coeur-de-lion's ruined brother, is further indication of the relative positions of the characters here.

60 *displeasure*: Disaffected subjects and foreign enemies.

63 *happy*: Favourable, fortunate.

65 *inglorious league*: Shameful, humiliating treaty.

66 *upon the footing of our land*: Standing here upon our native earth.

67 *fair-play orders*: Chivalrous conditions and stipulations.

68 *Insinuation*: Ingratiating proposals.

69 *invasive*: Invading.

beardless boy: Cf. V.2.133; historically the Dauphin was twenty-nine at the time of his invasion of England.

70 *cockered*: Spoiled, effete.

silken wanton: Dandified play-boy.

brave: (1) Defy, insult or (2) show himself off in.

fields: The sense 'battlefields' is also present.

71 *flesh his spirit*: Achieve his initiation in military prowess. (To

‘flesh one’s sword’, the more usual phrase, was ‘to draw blood for the first time’.)

72 *idly*: (1) Carelessly (without heed or respect for English opposition) or (2) uselessly (because there is no one to oppose them).

73 *check*: Resistance, opposition.

us: Emphatic.

74 *your peace*: Not ‘our peace’; the Bastard does not associate himself with Pandulph’s efforts.

77 *Have thou the ordering of this present time*: John recognizes what the scene has made clear – that the Bastard is now in control of English resistance.

79 *may well meet*: (1) Is likely to encounter or (2) is ready and competent to face. The Bastard’s confident tone makes the latter more likely.

prouder: More valiant and fierce.

V.2

The scene begins a series of six in which Shakespeare keeps precise control over the time-scheme: as it closes, the war-drums announce the battle which begins in the next scene, and thereafter the passage of time is carefully marked (see [headnotes to V.3–7](#)). The present scene may be imagined as occurring three days after IV.3, in which the nobles plan to set off, on the next day, on a two days’ journey to Bury (IV.3.18–20). The exact interval, however, is not important. Shakespeare’s main intention here is to give a demonstration of the Bastard’s wielding of the authority he has just been given (V.1.77), and to explore the consequences of the nobles’ overhasty decision in IV.3.

The historical episodes of the scene cover the years 1214–16. The meeting at Bury St Edmunds took place, as Holinshed records, in the autumn of 1214. Lewis was not present at this meeting. A confrontation between Lewis and the papal legate Gualo (who took over from Pandulph in the latter part of the conflict) is reported by Holinshed as occurring in April 1216, just before the French invasion of England.

Shakespeare takes his material from two scenes of *The Troublesome Reign* (the third and fourth of Part II). The first of these deals with the meeting at Bury; the second (which begins with Pandulph returning John’s crown, an episode Shakespeare has already used in V.1) depicts a confrontation between Lewis

and his supporters, on the one hand, and Pandulph, King John and the Bastard, on the other. There is much stress in the Bury scene of *The Troublesome Reign* on the fact that obedience to the Pope is one of the nobles' strongest motives, and their anger and resentment towards John is unequivocal, with none of the grief which Shakespeare introduces. The swearing by the nobles of their oaths of allegiance to Lewis, which the anonymous author depicts in full, is omitted in *King John*. Shakespeare's scene begins just after these oaths have been sworn. *The Troublesome Reign* goes on to show the Dauphin's counter-plot against the English nobles, and the oaths of loyalty to this plot taken by the French leaders; we therefore know immediately that the rebel nobles are doomed in their support of Lewis. Shakespeare's omission of this not only increases the dramatic speed of events, but also maintains tension until the revelation of the plot at V.4.14–20.

In the confrontation between Lewis and Pandulph, Shakespeare expands Lewis's defiance and reduces Pandulph to ineffective and feeble protest (109 and 162). His focus here is firmly on the young men: in *The Troublesome Reign* John himself is present during the interview with Lewis, though he says little; Shakespeare leaves it entirely to the Bastard to act as the voice of English resilience. The independence and vigour of his and Lewis's speeches of defiance thus lead effectively, at the close of the scene, into the commencement of battle.

Shakespeare's alterations thus work in two directions: they induce an ambiguous attitude to the rebel lords and they assert the Bastard as the leader of English resistance. In the Protestant atmosphere of the source play, the rebels' emphasis on their loyalty to Rome seriously damages their cause in our eyes; their grievances are also shown, in a detailed speech from the Bastard, to be groundless. Shakespeare's presentation of Salisbury's deeply felt grief, his omission of the disturbing scene of the nobles' swearing allegiance to a foreign prince, and his protection of them from the derision which immediate revelation of the Dauphin's counter-plot would involve, prevent Salisbury and his fellows from appearing simply contemptible. This then allows their return to allegiance to become an acceptable element in the mood of triumph at the end of the play. And in emphasizing the confusion and grief of the rebel lords, Shakespeare contrasts them vividly with the Bastard, who now becomes the representative of English independence, speaking passionately, and with something

of his old exuberance, on the broad issues of loyalty and patriotism.

- 0 *Melun*: See [note to IV.3.15](#). This is his first appearance. Other French nobles and commanders will be present, though neither Shakespeare nor *The Troublesome Reign* identifies them individually.
- 2 *remembrance*: The metre requires four syllables.
- 3 *precedent*: Original draft of the treaty now to be *copied out*.
- 4 *our fair order*: The reasonable, equitable terms of our agreement.
- 6 *wherefore*: Accented on the second syllable.
took the sacrament: Received communion (a solemn way of sealing a vow). Shakespeare increases the solemnity: both Holinshed and *The Troublesome Reign* refer only to an oath taken on the altar of the shrine of St Edmund.
- 9–11 *we swear ... your proceedings*: We give our oaths with unforced approval of your aims and plans and a belief in them which is our own, not elicited by your persuasions. On *zeal*, see [note to II.1.19](#).
- 10 *A voluntary zeal and an unurged faith*: The scansion is difficult: if *voluntary* is pronounced with three syllables ('volunt'ry') and *unurged* with two, an irregular pentameter is achieved; if *voluntary* is given four syllables and *unurged* three ('unurgèd') a more regular alexandrine, perhaps not inappropriate in Salisbury's weighty meditation, results.
- 12–13 *that such a sore ... contemned revolt*: That the ills of the present time should look for their cure to the despicable remedy of rebellion.
- 13 *plaster*: Dressing for a wound.
- 14 *inveterate canker*: Deep-rooted corruption.
- 15 *By making many*: Wounds, in battle.
- 16 *this metal*: His sword.
- 17 *there*: In England.
- 18–19 *Where honourable rescue ... the name of Salisbury*: (1) Where those engaged in the honourable defence of their homeland exclaim against Salisbury or (2) (possibly) where honourable deeds cry out to Salisbury for action.
- 19 *Cries*: Singular verb after plural subject, *rescue* and *defence* forming a single idea.
- 20–21 *But such is the infection ... physic of our right*: Salisbury returns to the medical metaphor of 12–13, seeing the state as a diseased body in need of cure. (Cf. V.1.12–13.)

- 21–3 *That, for the health ... confused wrong*: The involved ambiguity of this, turning on puns on *right* and *wrong*, is an indication of the moral fog in which the nobles find themselves through rebellion.
- 21 *physic*: Cure (more precisely, a dose of medicine).
our right: The idea that the lords are acting to protect their own rights derives from *The Troublesome Reign*, where (II.395–407) they list three motives for their assembly at Bury: (1) the banishment of the Earl of Chester (not mentioned at all by Shakespeare); (2) ‘our private wrongs’ (alluded to by Shakespeare only in this line); (3) the death of Arthur (which Shakespeare concentrates on almost exclusively). In Holinshed the reason for the assembly is simply contention between King and barons over feudal rights, and the movement leads directly to Magna Carta. (On other possible relics of Magna Carta in the play, see [notes to IV.2.43–6](#) and [168](#).)
- 22–3 *We cannot deal ... confused wrong*: (1) We are forced to adopt unjust and blameworthy methods, which lead to confusion *or* (2) we are forced to deal with the *hand* (John’s) which has brought confusion by the injustices and wrongs it has committed.
- 24 *is’t not pity*: These words govern the rest of the sentence, down to 32.
- 29 *withdraw and weep*: However genuine Salisbury’s grief may be, his public tears ironically recall his scorn of Hubert’s sincere grief (IV.3.107–10).
- 29–30 *weep* | *Upon the spot*: (1) Weep here in this place *or* (2) weep for (upon the provocation of) this stain or disgrace *or* (3) let my tears fall on the stain (of England’s disgrace) – as though to wash it out.
- 30 *enforced cause*: The lords’ cause (rebellion) taken up only through force of circumstances.
- 31 *grace*: (1) Show honour and grace to *or* (2) grace or enhance (with our presence).
- 32 *unacquainted colours*: Unfamiliar (French instead of English) battle ensigns.
- 33 *remove*: Remove yourself.
- 34 *Neptune’s arms, who clippeth thee about*: The sea, which closely embraces you.
- 35 *bear thee from the knowledge of thyself*: Remove you from awareness of your own situation. The idea is that, if England and the English nation could be removed to a new environment,

familiar quarrels and hatreds would disappear.

- 36 *grapple*: Join, fasten (as ships locked together in battle by grappling-irons). Shakespeare continues the bold conceit of England being moved, like a ship, across the sea, to land on a distant shore where the two armies could unite in league. (The F reading *cripple* makes only very strained sense in the context, and the overall nautical imagery of the lines supports the emendation to *grapple* first suggested by Pope.)
- 37 *two Christian armies*: The English (under John) and the Dauphin's army, with its English supporters. The idea is of an international crusade against the *pagan shore*.
- 38 *The blood of malice in a vein of league*: Enmity in a mood of friendly truce (with play on *vein* as both 'blood-vessel' and 'mood', 'humour').
- 39 *it*: The blood.
so unneighbourly: In so unneighbourly, uncharitable a fashion.
- 40–63 *A noble temper ... the strength of mine*: The smoothness of the Dauphin's speech produces an uneasy sense of hypocrisy (confirmed when we learn his real plans for his English supporters at V.4.14–20).
- 40 *temper*: State of mind, nature.
- 41 *great affections*: Extremes of powerful feeling.
- 42 *Doth*: Singular verb after plural subject, as frequently when subject and verb are widely separated.
make an earthquake of nobility: Turn a noble nature into a turmoil of emotion.
- 44 *Between compulsion and a brave respect*: Between what you were compelled to do (by your regard for right – that is, to rebel) and your admirable love and respect (for your native land).
- 45 *honourable dew*: Tears (thought of as the result of Salisbury's *honourable* nature).
- 46 *progress*: Perhaps with reference to a royal progress (ceremonial journey), again implying (like *silverly*) the nobility of the emotion displayed.
- 48 *Being an ordinary inundation*: The scansion of this line is irregular; it is perhaps best accented as 'Being an ordinary inundation'.
ordinary inundation: Everyday example of tearful emotion.
- 50 *blown up by tempest of the soul*: Provoked by the fierce pulls of conflicting emotions.
- 51 *amazed*: Astonished, bewildered (stronger than the present

sense).

- 53 *meteors*: See [note to III.4.157](#).
- 56 *Commend*: Leave, bequeath.
- 57 *the giant world*: The world which Salisbury knows, outside the child's perception.
- 58 *Nor met with fortune other than at feasts*: And have encountered fortune only in its bountiful, giving mood.
- 59 *Full warm of blood*: In friendly warmth of human feeling.
- 60–63 *thou shalt thrust ... strength of mine*: The Dauphin's final answer to Salisbury's grief is in terms of straightforwardly material consolation.
- 63 *knit your sinews to the strength of mine*: Unite your strength with mine.
- 64 *an angel spake*: The Dauphin is claiming divine sanction for his words, but in what way is not clear from the text as printed in F. This edition follows that of Dover Wilson in adding the stage direction for the sounding of a trumpet after 63. This gives immediate theatrical point to the Dauphin's remark. Angels were traditionally illustrated with trumpets, and the verb 'speak' is often used of the sounding of trumpets. An ambassador to an army encamped for battle would certainly give some signal of his approach. At 116 there is again no direction in F, and here a trumpet is quite clearly called for.
- 66 *warrant from the hand of heaven*: The Dauphin looks to the highest authority for justification of his political self-interest. (His search for a *warrant* follows interestingly upon the question of Hubert's *warrant* for blinding Arthur (see [note to IV.1.6](#)).)
- 67 *set*: As a seal, continuing the idea of a *warrant*.
- 69 *The next*: The next thing I have to say. Pandulph is brusque with a young man whom he believes (from their dialogue in III.4) to be under his control.
- 70 *is come in*: Has submitted, been reconciled.
- 71 *stood out against*: (Playing on *come in* at 70) opposed.
- 73 *threatening colours*: Ensigns displayed in readiness for battle.
- 75 *fostered up at hand*: Hand-reared.
- 78 *shall*: Must.
- 79 *to be propertied*: To be treated as a tool or puppet.
- 80 *secondary at control*: An agent under someone else's control.
- 81 *useful*: Pejorative: someone to be made use of.
- 83 *Your breath first kindled the dead coal of wars*: Your words first fanned the flames of hostility. Similar images of Pandulph's role

are used at III.4.127 and V.1.17. The rekindling of the *dead coal* recalls IV.1.108–13.

85 *matter*: Fuel (the arguments used by Pandulph in III.4.112–81).

87 *same weak wind*: Pandulph's *breath*, or words. It is precisely in the terms in which he had expressed confidence in his power to end the war (V.1.17–21) that Pandulph is rebuffed.

88 *know the face of right*: Recognize what was my due.

89 *Acquainted me with interest to this land*: Made known to me the claims I have in this country. (See III.4.142–3.)

93 *by the honour of my marriage-bed*: In the right of my wife (Blanche).

99 *underprop*: Support, uphold.

101 *such as to my claim are liable*: Those who are subject to my demands for service.

104–7 *'Vive le roi!' ... yielded set*: The lines are an extended card-playing metaphor, the battle being seen as a *match* with the English *crown* (106) as the stake.

104 *Vive le roi*: Long live the King (called in French to declare acceptance of the Dauphin's claims; also a card-playing term). The final 'e' of *Vive* is sounded.

banked: Many explanations have been offered, none of them wholly satisfactory. It seems most likely that the word is part of the card-playing metaphor and is used to mean 'put in the bank' or 'won' (suggesting the ease of the Dauphin's advance described at V.1.30–32). Against this is the fact that the word is not otherwise recorded in this sense until the nineteenth century. A more usual gloss on 'bank' is 'to sail by the banks of' (on the analogy of the verb 'to coast'), with the suggestion that in this line Shakespeare recalls *The Troublesome Reign*, II.519–20: 'And from the hollow holes of Thamesis | Echo apace replied "Vive le roi!".' But neither the passage in *The Troublesome Reign* nor anything in Holinshed suggests that the Dauphin approached London by river, only that the banks of the Thames echoed the shouts of welcome; and there is no other recorded instance of the verb 'to bank' used in this sense.

106 *crown*: Punning on the crown of England and five shillings as a stake at cards.

107 *give o'er the yielded set*: Give up the advantage of having won the first round or rubber.

108 *No! No, on my soul*: Usually printed as 'No, no, on my soul'. The first *No*, however, is extra-metrical and the punctuation here

adopted emphasizes this indication of the vehemence of the Dauphin's response to his own question.

- 109 *look but on the outside of this work*: Consider only the surface of the problem. Pandulph, normally so verbose, is here reduced to a single line of feeble protest.
- 112 *ample hope*: High hopes.
- 113 *drew this gallant head of war*: Gathered this gallant army to do battle.
- 114–16 *culled these fiery spirits ... danger and of death*: Picked these brave men, taking them away from worldly cares into a search for honour which will face up to and outstare the threat of conquest and of death.
- 117 *lusty trumpet*: Vigorous trumpet-blast.
- 118–23 *According to the fair play ... unto my tongue*: The Bastard, as official English ambassador, adopts a tone of high formality.
- 118 *fair play of the world*: The normal chivalric laws of war. This is the very *fair-play* which the Bastard condemns at V.1.67; now as the leader of English resistance, he must explore the possibilities of peace before leading the English army into war.
- 119 *to speak*: Rather than to fight.
- 120 *My holy lord of Milan*: The Bastard's courtesy to Pandulph seems to be another aspect of his ambassadorial role. It masks the hostility he showed to John's alliance with Pandulph (V.1.65–76), a hostility which manifests itself again at 127–8 and 174 below.
- 122–3 *as you answer ... limited unto my tongue*: According to the nature of your reply, I know the appointed authority and latitude I have to answer you.
- 124 *wilful-opposite*: Intractably hostile.
- 127 *all the blood that ever fury breathed*: All those brave spirits who ever breathed the fury of battle.
- 128 *The youth says well*: The Bastard's exclamation seems to be a signal of his relief at the removal of the necessity for playing the role of peace-making ambassador.
- 128–9 *our English King*, | *For thus his royalty doth speak in me*: The Bastard's picture of an idealized English king here and in his following lines (especially 148–9 and 176) bears little resemblance to the monarch we saw feebly passing command to his nephew in the previous scene. But the Bastard's decision to remain loyal to John at IV.3.157 imposed upon him the task of maintaining the fiction of John's regality, though he is himself in undisputed control of the nation's affairs until he can give his

loyalty to John's successor.

130 *and reason too he should*: And so he should be (perhaps suggesting the Bastard's exasperation that the account he gives of John's preparedness is an invention).

132 *harnessed masque*: Masquerade in armour.

unadvisedè revel: Ill-advised, foolish, game (of making war).

133 *unhaired*: Youthful (beardless). (Cf. V.1.69.)

136 *From out the circle*: Out of the confines.

137 *even*: One syllable.

138 *take the hatch*: Leap over the lower half of a divided door.

139 *concealèd wells*: Wells that offer concealment.

140 *crouch in litter of your stable planks*: Hide in the animal bed-straw on the floors of your stables.

141 *pawns*: Articles in pawn (kept locked up by the pawnbroker).

142 *hug*: Bed down.

sweet safety: Safety so much desired that it is *sweet* wherever found.

143 *thrill*: Tremble, shiver.

144 *your nation's crow*: Probably referring to the cockerel, a traditional symbol of France, rather than to the crow or raven, the bird of ill omen.

148–9 *the gallant monarch ... like an eagle*: The Bastard's efforts to assert John's strength and preparedness grow even more vigorous.

149 *eyrie*: Strictly the nest of a bird of prey, but here used for the brood.

towers: Soars (a term from falconry).

150 *souse annoyance*: Swoop down on, beat away, any intruder.

151–8 *And you degenerate ... bloody inclination*: The Bastard's short, powerful attack on the rebel lords is derived from a long, dull speech in *The Troublesome Reign* in which he answers all their grievances in detail. Their silence under his onslaught here perhaps prepares for their disillusionment when they next appear (see V.4.8).

151 *ingrate revolts*: Ungrateful rebels.

revolts: Accented on the first syllable.

152 *bloody Neroes*: Among his many crimes, the Roman Emperor Nero was said to have murdered his own mother by ripping open her womb.

152–3 *ripping up the womb* | *Of your dear mother England*: The personification vividly captures the savagery of civil war.

156 *armèd gauntlets*: Metal-plated leather gloves (an item of battle-

armour).

157 *needles*: One syllable: 'neels'.

159 *brave*: Boastful challenge, bravado.

turn thy face: Go back the way you came.

162 *brabblor*: Braggart, brawler.

Give me leave to speak: Again Pandulph attempts to assert his point of view. (Cf. 109 above.)

163 *No, I will speak*: The Bastard seems in danger of losing his new-found dignity in his anxiety to continue the verbal challenge.

attend to: (1) Listen to or (2) wait for.

164–5 *let the tongue of war* | *Plead for our interest*: The Dauphin refuses to enter into the dispute; the noise of battle-drums is to provide the only argument on his side.

167–70 *Do but start ... all as loud as thine*: The moment you create an echo with the noise of one of your drums, you will find one of ours close at hand, the skin stretched tight, ready to sound out quite as loudly as yours.

170 *reverberate*: The third syllable is elided.

172 *rattle the welkin's ear*: Reverberate to the skies. (The use of *welkin*, a word which Shakespeare seems often to use with consciously 'poetic' intent, suggests that the Bastard is trying to impress.)

174 *halting*: Wavering, dilatory. The insulting epithet may allude to Pandulph's *halting* attempts to make himself heard in the debate (109 and 162).

176–7 *in his forehead sits* | *A bare-ribbed death*: Death is imagined as a skeleton waiting to go forth, at John's command, among the French.

177 *office*: Duty, function.

179 *find this danger out*: Discover the truth of this threatened danger.

V.3

This, the first of a series of short, urgent scenes depicting the battle and its aftermath, takes place *an hour or two* before sunset (V.5.17–18) and presumably after the fighting (heralded by the drums at the end of V.2) has been in progress for much of the day. (John's question in line 1, the dialogue at V.4.1–6, and Lewis's statement at V.5.4–8 all seem to suggest a battle of some length.) The scene may be imagined as taking place somewhere near Bury St Edmunds, where V.2 was located. Holinshed reports

no battle here, of course, nor any clearly defined engagement between the French invaders and the English forces during John's life. A decisive victory was, however, gained in the spring of 1217, when Pembroke routed the French at Lincoln. The slight rearrangement of historical time necessary to bring this forward would not be unusual in this play, though the outcome of the battle, too, is less decisive here. The French naval defeat reported in this scene also seems to have been brought forward, and modified, from the chronicle account of the events of the first year of Henry III's reign (see 9–13 and [note](#)).

In this rearrangement of history, Shakespeare follows *The Troublesome Reign*. His scene is based on the first section of a much longer scene (the sixth of Part II) in the anonymous play. This shows the Bastard leaving the battlefield with John and recounting the effect on the English army of the rumour that the King has departed: 'fear', he reports, has 'captivated courage quite', and he, with the rest, 'was fain to fly before the eager foe' (II.822–6). He describes the resultant loss of men and supplies in the Wash (not mentioned by Shakespeare until V.6.39–42), and the scene goes on to depict John's arrival at Swinstead Abbey and the plotting of his death by the abbot and one of the monks.

Shakespeare treats the murder of John much more briefly than this (see [headnote to V.6](#)). In the present scene he omits all reference to fear and flight, keeps the Bastard on the battlefield, brings forward the news of the French naval defeat, withholds news of the disaster in the Wash, and places the scene before that of Melun's revelation of the Dauphin's treachery (V.4), reversing the order of *The Troublesome Reign* – all in order to assert the fact, not at all the concern of the source play, that it is the positive qualities of the Bastard's leadership, more than the defection of the rebel nobles from their new master, which hold the English side together and make victory possible. And in bringing in Hubert, not used in *The Troublesome Reign* after the equivalent of Shakespeare's V.1, but present here beside his monarch in a time of danger, Shakespeare asserts his loyalty too, preparing us for the important penultimate scene of the play.

- 0 [Alarums](#): Sounds of fighting and battle offstage.
- 1 [How goes the day with us](#): How are we faring in the battle? John is apparently far from the centre of control, unable even to see the action.
- 3 [fever](#): In *The Troublesome Reign* John leaves the battlefield

suffering from fever, but is later shown dying of poison. In Holinshed, fever and poison are offered as alternative causes of his death. Shakespeare follows the anonymous play in presenting both possibilities.

troubled me so long: There has been no earlier evidence of John's sickness. Shakespeare, perhaps conscious of the confusion of his sources, possibly adds this detail to increase the sense of authenticity.

4 *my heart is sick*: John's mood of despairing inertia continues from V.1.

6 *Desires your majesty to leave the field*: The Bastard is clearly in full command.

field: Battlefield.

8 *toward Swinstead, to the abbey there*: The abbey was in fact at Swineshead, not far from Boston, in Lincolnshire, and twenty-five miles from Swinstead (which had no abbey) in the same county. The mistake also occurs in *The Troublesome Reign*; Holinshed spells the name correctly. In Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* the monk who poisons John is named as 'Simon of Swinstead', and this may be the source of the dramatists' error.

9–13 *the great supply ... retire themselves*: Shakespeare has brought forward the news of the French defeat at sea. In *The Troublesome Reign* it is brought to Lewis after the day's fighting (the Dauphin receives the same news in *King John* at V.5.12–13). Shakespeare's motive in bringing it to the English side earlier seems to be part of his plan to present here a much brighter picture of English fortunes than the source play. He confuses the picture slightly in so doing: line 13 suggests that the French *fight coldly* because of the bad news of their navy, but in fact they have not yet received this news. This discrepancy would not be noticed in the theatre, where the report of the French coldness would emphasize the vigour of the Bastard's leadership (as it does again at V.4.1–5), and the later suggestion that the sides are still evenly matched would lead more smoothly to the play's final solution in which the outcome of the battle will be irrelevant. There is no record in Holinshed of the foundering of a French fleet in this way, though the chronicle reports the emphatic defeat, in August 1217 (nearly a year after John's death), of a large French navy by an English fleet under Hubert de Burgh. Shakespeare follows *The Troublesome Reign* in reducing an English naval victory to an accidental wreck in order to maintain the confusion and tension up to the moment

when the arrival of the new king moves the play in a more positive and forward-looking direction.

9 *great supply*: Large reinforcements.

11 *Are*: Plural verb after singular subject, in contrast to *was* in the preceding line. Presumably the *supply* is now thought of in terms of the number of ships carrying it.

wracked: Shipwrecked.

three nights ago: This may be an example of Shakespeare's care with the geography and with the time-scheme: if the present scene takes place at Bury St Edmunds, two days' ride from London, three days would be an appropriate interval for news to travel, by way of London, from east Kent.

Goodwin Sands: Dangerous shoals off the coast of Kent, some five miles east of Sandwich.

12 *Richard*: The Bastard, to whom the important strategic news has first been brought, making clear his absolute control of the English army.

13 *retire themselves*: Retreat, fall back.

14 *fever burns me up*: When we next see John, in V.7, poison has taken over from fever as the burning agent, bringing to its climax the play's recurrent imagery of fire and burning.

16 *litter*: Portable bed. In *The Troublesome Reign* John is 'carried between two lords' (stage direction at II.785), with no mention of a litter. This line therefore seems to be an example of Shakespeare's direct use of Holinshed, who reports that the King, taken ill just before his death, 'was not able to ride, but was fain to be carried in a litter presently made of twigs'.

V.4

The second of the battle scenes takes place just on sunset (33–5), an hour or two later than V.3. It is based on a single scene in *The Troublesome Reign* (the fifth in Part II), though Shakespeare changes the order of scenes, showing John's withdrawal from the battle just before, rather than just after, Melun's confession. Shakespeare follows his source closely, but, because he chose not to reveal the Dauphin's plot against the English in his Bury St Edmunds scene, Melun's revelations now come as a shock, whereas they are merely tediously repetitious in *The Troublesome Reign*. The only significant modification of the source material comes at the end, with the impressive image of the nobles' return to allegiance at 52–7. There is nothing in this mood in *The*

Troublesome Reign. Shakespeare's earlier care to retain some of our sympathy for the rebels makes possible this anticipation of the mood of unity at the close of the play.

The episode of Melun's confession derives ultimately from Holinshed, who places it in August 1216.

- 1 *stored with*: Plentifully provided with, rich in.
- 3 *miscarry*: Fail, come to grief.
- 4 *devil*: See [note to II.1.135](#).
- 5 *In spite of spite*: In spite of all we can do, against all odds.
alone. Shakespeare continues his deliberate emphasis on the Bastard's total control of English resistance (see [V.3.1](#), [6](#) and [12](#), and notes).
upholds the day: Maintains the English attack.
- 7 *revolts*: Accented on the first syllable.
- 8 *When we were happy we had other names*: (1) We were happier when we had other names (that is, when we were loyal) or (2) we were spoken to by other names (that is, with more respect) when we were happy (in loyalty). The disillusionment of the nobles precedes the revelation of the Dauphin's plot and follows on appropriately from their silence before the Bastard's verbal onslaught at V.2.151–8.
- 10 *bought and sold*: Tricked, betrayed (proverbial).
- 11 *Unthread the rude eye of rebellion*: Retrace your steps. Rebellion is seen as a needle into which they have threaded themselves; the process of returning to their true allegiance will be as simple as unthreading it again.
- 12 *welcome home again discarded faith*: Return once more to your proper course of loyalty and patriotism.
- 14 *be lords of this loud day*: Are victorious in this hectic battle.
- 15 *He*: The Dauphin; the vagueness recalls IV.3.11. The confederates know well enough who is meant.
- 22 *Have I not hideous death within my view*: Melun's reply stems from the belief that a man always told the truth at his death, otherwise he went to his judgement with sin fresh in his soul.
- 23 *quantity*: Small amount.
- 24–5 *even as a form of wax ... the fire*: Just as a wax image is melted out of shape before the fire.
- 27 *lose the use of all deceit*: (1) Lose any usefulness or advantage to be gained by deceiving you or (2) (possibly) lose my capacity to indulge in deceit (that is, die).
- 29 *hence*: In the next world.

- 31 *He is forsworn*: He will have broken his word.
- 33 *contagious breath*: Referring to the reputedly unwholesome quality of the night air.
- 34 *smokes*: Spreads mistily.
burning crest: The allusion is to the fiery-red curve of the last visible portion of the setting sun.
- 36 *breathing*: Life.
- 37 *fine of rated treachery*: Fine ordered for treason which has been revealed and judged.
- 38 *treacherous fine of all your lives*: (1) The forfeit of your lives, a penalty treacherously imposed by the Dauphin or (2) a treacherous end (French ‘*fin*’) to your lives (dying in rebellion against your country).
- 40–42 *Commend me to one Hubert ... was an Englishman*:
 Shakespeare takes the second of Melun’s reasons from the source play and invents the first. Line 42 follows exactly *The Troublesome Reign*, II.748. In the source play this line appears as one of two reasons for Melun’s confession. (The other, the desire to die with a clear conscience, Shakespeare has already used at 22.) Holinshed gives no indication of an English ancestry for Melun, and the implausible suddenness of its revelation in *The Troublesome Reign* may have suggested to Shakespeare the idea of adding Melun’s acquaintance with Hubert as a further explanation for his confession. This, however, is also unexpected, and Shakespeare’s invention of it may rather be to increase the prominence of Hubert just before his reappearance in the important penultimate scene of the play. The idea of a French background for Hubert, which this brief reference implies, is also relevant to the problem of the identification of him with the spokesman for Angiers in II.1 (see [An Account of the Text](#), pp. 105–6).
- 44 *In lieu whereof*: In recompense for which (my confession and warning).
- 45 *rumour*: Confused roar, tumult.
- 47 *part*: Be present at the separation of. Melun speaks as though he is a spectator of his own death – an impression reinforced by his description of ‘*this body and my soul*’.
- 49–51 *bescrew my soul ... this most fair occasion*: May my soul be accursed if I do not rejoice at the welcome appearance of this fortunate opportunity.
- 52 *untread*: Retrace. (Cf. *Unthread* in 11 above.)

damnèd flight: Their rebellion, or *flight* from allegiance.

53–7 *And like a bated and retirèd flood ... to our great King John*:

The image of the river of power turned away from its proper course (but now returning to it) recalls II.1.335–40.

53 *bated*: Abated, subsided.

flood: River, stream (any watercourse).

54 *rankness*: Headstrong and excessive growth (their going beyond the bounds of due obedience).

irregular: (1) Unruly, disobedient or (2) unaccustomed, extraordinary or (3) wavering, tortuous.

55 *Stoop low within those bounds we have o'erlooked*: (1) Retire to a course within the banks we have overflowed (continuing the river metaphor) or (2) kneel down (for pardon) and submit ourselves to the restrictions of that obedience which we have disregarded.

57 *to our ocean, to our great King John*: The words scarcely fit the king whom we have just seen carried from the battlefield. But, as the climax of an image of returning allegiance, they should probably be interpreted, not ironically, but as an idealization of the concepts of loyalty and of English monarchy which the final scene of the play is to assert and which this return to allegiance makes possible.

60 *Right*: Clearly, unmistakably.

New flight: Another change of allegiance (echoing *damnèd flight*, 52).

61 *And happy newness, that intends old right*: And a change of allegiance to be welcomed, since its object is the restoration of right government and of our former right conduct.

V.5

This, the third of the battle scenes, takes place just after sunset (1–2), and is adapted from a single scene of *The Troublesome Reign* (the seventh of Part II). Shakespeare abbreviates an initial speech from Lewis in which he claims outright victory, showing him instead pleased with the day's battle, but not claiming total success (8). He then has a single messenger bring news of Melun's death (already known to Lewis in the source play), of the defection of Lewis's English supporters, and of the loss at sea of the reinforcements. In *The Troublesome Reign* three separate messengers bring news of the desertion of the English rebels, of the shipwreck and of John's disaster in the Wash. Lewis is left believing that 'John is drowned and I am England's king' (II.980).

Shakespeare holds back news of the disaster in the Wash until V.6.39–42, where it becomes an effective element in the atmosphere of foreboding tension, and he leaves Lewis here in a subdued, uncertain mood which makes his later willingness to come to terms (V.7.81–6) much more plausible.

- 0 *and his train*: The French nobles and commanders of whom only Melun has been identified by name.
- 2 *welkin*: Sky, heavens. (See [note to V.2.172](#).)
blush: The red glow of the sunset sky is thought of as reflecting the shame of the English in their retreat.
- 3 *measured*: Traversed, crossed.
- 4 *faint retire*: Cowardly retreat. The Dauphin's claim contrasts with the English statement that the French *retire themselves* (V.3.13). Though both sides claim the ascendancy, the final outcome of the battle is left undecided and proves irrelevant.
bravely came we off: We left the battlefield with a fine flourish.
- 5 *needless shot*: Ammunition no longer required (because the English were in retreat). The French have marked the end of the day's fighting by firing a volley of bullets, apparently rather aimlessly, as a way to *bid good night* (6).
- 7 *tottering*: (1) Waving to and fro (in the wind) or (2) tattering, tattered (a sign of hard fighting, not of disgrace). F's spelling, *tott'ring*, reflects the pronunciation required by the metre.
clearly: Without interference (from the English army).
- 8 *Last in the field*: To be the last army left on a battlefield is usually a sign of victory; but the battle has only been *almost* won.
- 11 *are again fallen off*: Have withdrawn their allegiance once more.
fallen: The F spelling, *falne*, indicates the need for a slight elision (but see [note to I.1.9–10](#)).
- 12–13 *And your supply ... sunk on Goodwin Sands*: At the equivalent moment of *The Troublesome Reign* this news comes for the first time. On Shakespeare's motives for bringing it in earlier, see [note to V.3.9–13](#).
- 13 *Are*: Plural verb after singular subject; see [note to V.3.11](#).
- 14 *shrewd*: Harsh, bitter.
Beshrew: Curse (playing on *shrewd*). The convention of messengers being blamed for the news they bring is common in Elizabethan drama.
- 17–18 *an hour or two before* | *The stumbling night*: Shakespeare's careful ordering of the time-scheme continues.

- 18 *stumbling night*: Darkness that causes stumbling.
20 *keep good quarter*: Keep a good watch at your posts.
22 *fair adventure*: Good fortune.

V.6

It is now the middle of the night (17, 19 and 39), a few hours later than the preceding scene. Hubert, who left the battlefield with John at the end of V.3, has accompanied the King to Swinstead and is now returning to seek the Bastard, who at sunset was still in control of the English battle-lines (V.4.4–5). In the meantime events have occurred rapidly: John has been poisoned and the Bastard's troops have suffered a serious accident in the Wash. The present scene apparently takes place somewhere between the Wash and Swinstead. The geography and the time-scheme are incompatible: since the battle and the meeting in V.2 must, by the timing, happen at the same place, a journey from Bury St Edmunds to Lincolnshire, and part-way back again, seems to have been accomplished by Hubert in less than one night. As suggested in the headnote to V.3, however, Shakespeare may have the Battle of Lincoln in mind. In any case, it is the time-scheme, not the geography, in which Shakespeare is interested, and the mood of urgency and tension which the rapid series of battle scenes produces would make the possible geographical discrepancies insignificant in the theatre.

There is no equivalent in *The Troublesome Reign* for this important scene. It is made possible by Shakespeare's decision to show Hubert, rather than the Bastard, beside John as he leaves the battlefield (see [headnote to V.3](#)). The news of the disaster in the Wash is then delayed by Shakespeare, so that (as in IV.3) we see Hubert and the Bastard in alliance at a time of acute danger, seeming to decide the fate of England between them. But though there is no source for the structure of the scene, there is for its material, and Shakespeare's handling of it compares interestingly with his originals.

In *The Troublesome Reign* we see John arrive at Swinstead Abbey, and immediately afterwards are shown the monk Thomas plotting his death. The satirical tone of this scene, in keeping with the source play's overall anti-Catholic mood, continues (after the interval of the scene from which Shakespeare derived his V.5) with John drinking from a bowl of 'wassail' poisoned by a toad's 'inwards'; the monk, who is shown tasting the drink to convince

John of its wholesomeness, dies soon afterwards, and the Bastard, present with the King throughout these events, kills the abbot in retaliation. Shakespeare's compression of the anonymous author's drawn-out and crude material into the tense and fearful atmosphere of this midnight scene is dramatically much more effective.

The source for the account of John's death in *The Troublesome Reign* is clearly Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, and Shakespeare himself seems to have looked at Foxe for at least one point (see [note to 30](#)). Holinshed's most confidently stated theory of John's death is that he 'took such grief' at the disaster to his troops in the Wash that 'he fell into an ague', from which he died (on 19 October 1216). Shakespeare and *The Troublesome Reign* use the idea of the 'ague' earlier (see [note to V.3.3](#)). The story of the poisoning by a monk is only Holinshed's second possibility, and the chronicle goes on to record several other theories.

The seriousness of the news which Hubert brings to the Bastard in this scene is matched by the Bastard's account of the disaster in the Wash (39–42). The famous event is briefly recounted by Holinshed. John, travelling from King's Lynn to Lincoln, 'hasted forward till he came to Wellstream Sands, where, passing the washes, he lost a great part of his army, with horses and carriages'. Shakespeare follows *The Troublesome Reign* in transferring the leadership of the army from John to the Bastard, but whereas in the source play the accident occurs as the Bastard flees from the fighting (see [headnote to V.3](#)), Shakespeare delays the news until now and offers no suggestion of flight. When the Bastard reports the accident directly to John, in fact, at V.7.61–4, we learn that his movement of troops was made *upon advantage*. This care to maintain the impression of the Bastard's valour and successful control of English fortunes is a significant indication of Shakespeare's intentions. In the emergency here the Bastard, confronted with the news of John's imminent death, and supported by the only other loyal and reliable man on the English side, takes full charge of the nation's fate: the man we have come to regard as the only possible ruler seems to be on the brink of power. Then comes the hitherto carefully hidden news that John has an heir (34) and the Bastard's acceptance of the need to continue in service and loyalty.

- 0 [severally](#): Separately (that is, by different entrances). In performance a slight pause might effectively be introduced before

the characters become aware of each other in the darkness.

- 1–6 *BASTARD Who's there ... Hubert, I think*: This distribution of speeches follows that in Dover Wilson's edition. The passage appears as follows in F:

Hub. Whose there? Speake hoa, speake quickly, or I shoote.

Bast. A Friend. What art thou?

Hub. Of the part of England.

Bast. Whether doest thou go?

Hub. What's that to thee?

Why may not I demand of thine affaires,

As well as thou of mine?

Bast. Hubert, I thinke.

The last of these lines is obviously correctly assigned to the Bastard. But the preceding speech should clearly be two speeches: the second part (which must be Hubert's since it is followed by the line directly addressed to him) is a response to the question *What's that to thee?* Working back from this through the pattern of alternating questions and answers or counter-questions, one arrives at the distribution of speeches as here printed, with the opening impetuous threat appropriately reallocated to the Bastard.

- 1 *Who's there*: The darkness makes visual recognition impossible.
- 6 *Thou hast a perfect thought*: You are perfectly right.
- 7 *upon all hazards*: Against any odds.
- 8 *tongue*: Voice.
- 9 *Who thou wilt*: The Bastard's enigmatic answer implies that Hubert may make of him what he will. Since between them they are virtually in control of the national destiny this is in a sense true.
- 11 *I come one way of the Plantagenets*: Even as we realize that English fortunes now depend entirely on the Bastard, the fact that the *one way* of his royal descent bars him from inheritance is recalled.
- 12 *Thou*: His *remembrance*, or memory.
endless night: Uninterrupted, unmitigated (and hence impenetrable) darkness.
- 13 *done me shame*: By causing me not to recognize a friend.
- 14–15 *That any accent ... true acquaintance of mine ear*: That any syllable from your mouth should not be recognized by me.
- 16 *Sans compliment*: Without formalities.

- 21 *Show me the very wound of this ill news*: Tell me the worst of this bad news. (The news is *ill*, hence the idea of its cause being in a wound.)
- 22 *swoond*: Swoon. The Bastard plays on *wound* at 21, the verbal dexterity, as usual in the play, reflecting intensity of involvement, rather than detachment.
- 24 *speechless*: Used in its literal sense. The poison has almost deprived John of the power of speech.
broke out: Hurried away.
- 26 *arm you to the sudden time*: Prepare yourself for this emergency. The Bastard will have to *arm* himself both physically and psychologically to face the crisis. (See 37–8 below.)
- 28 *take it*: The poison.
taste to him: Serve as taster for him. (Rulers would have their food tasted before eating it, in order to detect the possible presence of poison.)
- 29 *I tell you*: Hubert has already said (at 23) that a monk has poisoned John, and seems to expect the Bastard to make for himself the connection between the murderer and the taster. The connection is perfectly clear in the source and this may be an example of Shakespeare's economizing too drastically. Hubert's anxious brevity seems, however, very effective in the context.
resolved: The monk's resolution extends to suicide in his tasting the poisoned cup so that John will drink it.
- 30 *Whose bowels suddenly burst out*: Neither *The Troublesome Reign* nor Holinshed records this detail. Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, however, reports that 'the monk ... died, his guts gushing out of his belly'.
- 31 *Yet speaks*: Is still capable of speech (though according to 24 'almost speechless').
- 33 *The lords are all come back*: Salisbury and his fellows are ahead of the Bastard in their journey from the battlefield, which they left at the end of V.4.
- 34 *And brought Prince Henry in their company*: John's heir, referred to several times in Holinshed's account, is not mentioned in *The Troublesome Reign* until his entrance is announced in the scene of the King's death. His sudden appearance seems slightly incongruous. Shakespeare's first mentioning him here prepares us for his appearance and at the same time achieves a theatrically effective surprise in revealing the presence of an heir just as we have been lulled into believing that power is coming to rest

where it has seemed to belong, with the Bastard.

brought: There is a hint of force in the verb, as though the Prince may be a hostage protecting the rebels from punishment. The addition of such a suggestion (not present in the sources) would be in keeping with Shakespeare's care to emphasize the tenseness of the political situation here.

Prince Henry: Prince Henry, afterwards King Henry III, the son of King John and his second wife Isabelle of Angoulême, was born in 1207 and succeeded his father in 1216. He died in 1272.

35 *At whose request the King hath pardoned them*: In *The Troublesome Reign* pardon is secured for the returning rebels by a plea from Pandulph. Shakespeare's substitution of Prince Henry seems to reveal his concern to offer a picture of a nation united in loyalty, first suggested at V.4.52–7 and culminating in the play's closing speech.

37–8 *Withhold thine indignation ... our power*: The Bastard's prayer may be induced by relief that the quarrel between John and the nobles is settled: he therefore prays that God will *withhold* His (further) *indignation* from the land, and will not test (*tempt*) England (*us*) beyond its power to endure (*bear*). But if one takes *tempt* in its more usual sense and assumes that by *us* the Bastard refers to himself (the plural form being usual in the language of prayer), line 38 might mean 'and do not tempt me beyond my power to resist (*bear*)', or 'do not tempt me to go beyond (*bear above*) the power I have'. In both cases there seems to be the vague suggestion that the Bastard contemplates the idea of seizing power himself – a possibility the audience has inevitably also contemplated. The idea of the Bastard's being preoccupied with other, self-absorbing, thoughts may also explain why these two lines seem to fit so oddly in their general context.

40, 41 *these flats ... Lincoln Washes*: Holinshed places the accident on the Wellstream, the estuary of the Nene, north of Wisbech. (Land reclamation in this area has altered the topography beyond recognition in the intervening centuries.)

40 *are*: Plural verb after singular subject, *half my power* being thought of in terms of the number of men involved.

41 *devoured*: Drowned.

42 *hardly*: (1) Scarcely, barely or (2) with difficulty.

44 *doubt*: Fear.

or ere: Before.

It is now early morning: the Bastard arrives from his meeting with Hubert to report the accident which has occurred during the night; Pandulph is already resting after a night spent in peace negotiations with the French, and the final treaty will be ratified during the same afternoon. Shakespeare has thus carefully timed the scenes from V.2. to V.7 to fall within a period of no more than twenty-four hours. There is no such precise indication of timing in *The Troublesome Reign*, and in Holinshed the events depicted in these scenes happen over several years.

Shakespeare compresses two scenes of *The Troublesome Reign* into this final scene. The first begins with John's poisoning, an episode followed by the King's dying speeches of repentance and final confidence in his salvation. His dying lines also include a firm prophecy of the coming of Henry VIII to release England from bondage. The rest of this penultimate scene of the anonymous play shows the arrival of the lords with Prince Henry and Pandulph, the Cardinal's successful petition to the King for the rebels' forgiveness, and Pandulph's planning, with the Bastard's approval, to head off the Dauphin's advance through negotiation rather than military resistance. In a brief final scene we see Pandulph and the young King undertaking these negotiations with the Dauphin, who agrees to withdraw on realizing that he has no hope of success without the help of the English rebels. The play then ends with a patriotic speech from the Bastard in terms less general and far-reaching than in *King John*. The chronicle source for these events places John's death in October 1216 and the Dauphin's final withdrawal in September 1217, after the defeat of his army at Lincoln and his navy in the Channel (see [headnote to V.3](#)).

Shakespeare's adaptation of this material creates three distinct episodes. The first presents a mood of harmony in the relations between Prince Henry and his nobles. There is no equivalent in *The Troublesome Reign*, and Shakespeare's economy in reporting (at V.6.33–6), rather than showing, the nobles' arrival, so that their return to allegiance is known before the scene begins, makes this phase possible. In the second part of the scene, the tortured language of John's death speeches brings to its climax the long series of images of rage, heat and burning which have pervaded the play, and raises, in disturbing and equivocal form, the question of John's salvation. And having removed the confidence with which, in *The Troublesome Reign*, John asserts his own

salvation and foresees his Protestant descendant, Shakespeare also increases the harshness of the King's death. Instead of the hand raised in benison over the returning nobles, we have the bitter irony of John's slipping imperceptibly into death while news of defeat is given him – news which will soon prove to be irrelevant to the final peace settlement. In the third phase, Shakespeare gives the Bastard much more prominence than he has in *The Troublesome Reign*. Neither Pandulph nor the Dauphin appears, and the command of the situation is clearly with the Bastard. The honest energy and courage of his desire for military preparedness lead into his final speech, which is cast as an appeal for loyalty and patriotic honour in the broadest possible terms, providing a vigorous summary of the play's general concerns.

- 0 *Prince Henry*: See [note to V.6.34](#). The casting of the role will have a considerable influence on the final effect of the play. Too obvious a similarity to the childish weakness of Arthur (the roles have sometimes been doubled onstage) might leave the audience with little confidence in the durability of the peace achieved. Historically, King Henry III was just under ten at the time of his accession.
- 1–2 *The life of all his blood* | *Is touched corruptibly*: The vital essence of his blood is so infected that death is inevitable.
- 2 *pure*: Clear, lucid.
- 3 *Which some suppose*: The location of the soul within the body was a matter of dispute.
- 5 *mortality*: Mortal life (as opposed to the eternal life of the soul).
- 6 *yet doth speak*: Cf. V.6.24 and 31.
- 10 *Exit Bigot*: F provides no stage direction here, but some response to Prince Henry's request is necessary. His command might be obeyed at once, or acted on by Pembroke after he has responded to Prince Henry's next question. Whoever leaves the stage here must re-enter with John at 27 so that all three leaders of the baronial revolt will be onstage for the last part of the scene.
- 12 *Even now*: A moment ago.
- 13 *vanity*: Absurdity, foolishness.
- 13–14 *Fierce extremes ... feel themselves*: Great extremities (of pain or sickness), if they continue for a long time, prevent the sufferer from sensing them.
- 15–17 *Death, having preyed ... the mind*: When death has done its worst against the body, and found it finally incapable of further suffering (for the reasons just described), and so invincible to

further attack, it turns its ferocity on to the mind.

- 16 *invincible*: F reads *inuisible*, which, if taken as an adverb, makes some sense. (Death slips invisibly from his attack on the body to his attack on the mind.) But Prince Henry has just observed that beyond a certain point an increase of pain cannot be felt; he goes on to describe the mind, like the body, going beyond sensibility to suffering into incoherence; and he then (20) returns to the original idea of singing at the moment of death. In such a context the idea of the body being *invincible* to the suffering which death tries to impose, though paradoxical, is perfectly coherent. A misreading of 'invincible' as 'invisible' is not unlikely in Elizabethan handwriting.
- 18 *legions*: (1) Great numbers or (2) armies (continuing the battle metaphor of 16).
- 19–20 *Which, in their throng ... Confound themselves*: Which, as they gather round and press in upon that last stronghold, confuse and destroy themselves. (Like the body (which Prince Henry has just considered), the mind is left immune to death's attack, in a vacuum which allows the dying man to sing.)
- 21–4 *I am the cygnet ... lasting rest*: After the stern intellectualizing of the first half of the speech, the quiet beauty of these lines is startling.
- 21 *swan*: Alluding to the legend that the swan sings its only song just before death.
- 23 *the organ-pipe of frailty*: The throat of a dying man. The image continues that of the *hymn* of 22.
- 24 *His soul and body to their lasting rest*: The line seems to invite our curiosity about John's eternal fate. (Cf. IV.2.218 and 46–8 and 72 below.)
- 26 *set a form upon that indigest*: Bring pattern and order out of the confusion.
indigest: Shapeless mass.
- 27 *rude*: Unformed (ungoverned).
by Bigot: See note to the stage direction at 10. F here reads simply *Iohn brought in*.
- 28 *my soul hath elbow-room*: Shakespeare may allude to the superstition that it is easier to die out of doors.
- 29 *It would not out at windows nor at doors*: It would not go out (of my body) through windows or doors.
- 33 *fire*: Of the poison.
- 35 *Poisoned – ill fare*: The poignant, bitter joke does something to

restore our former admiration for John just before he dies. His is not a heroic death, but it is not contemptible either; like his life it remains ambiguous.

ill fare: (1) Bad food *or* (2) bad fortune.

36 *winter*: Continuing the metaphor of 30.

37 *maw*: Stomach (usually used of animals: John is contemptuous of his own dying body).

42 *cold comfort*: Punning on the ironic phrase for inadequate, empty consolation.

strait: Mean, niggardly.

44 *virtue*: Power to heal.

46–8 *Within me is a hell ... condemnèd blood*: The references to hell and condemnation inevitably renew the question of John's salvation or damnation (raised by Henry at 24).

48 *unretrievable, condemnèd blood*: Blood which cannot be saved from the death to which the irreversible effects of the poison have condemned it.

49 *scalded with my violent motion*: Continuing the imagery of burning. The Bastard has come in haste from his night meeting with Hubert in V.6.

51 *set mine eye*: After death.

52 *tackle*: Rigging. (John begins a series of ship images.)

burnt: The last of John's references to the burning poison, the past participle indicating that its work is almost done.

53 *shrouds*: Ropes supporting the masts and sails of a ship (with an allusion to the 'shroud', or winding-sheet, which will soon envelop him).

55 *string*: Heart-string, but continuing the rope/tackle imagery of the preceding lines.

58 *module*: Mere image, empty counterfeit.

confounded: Destroyed, defeated.

60 *God He knows how we shall answer him*: Only God knows how we shall meet and oppose him. F reads *heauen* for *God*, but the syntax makes it clear that censorship has altered the text here (see *An Account of the Text*, p. 108).

61 *in a night*: During the night.

the best part of my power: More than half (or, perhaps, the best trained and equipped) of my troops. The Bastard seems to place his loss a little higher than at V.6.39.

62 *upon advantage did remove*: Changed my position to gain an advantage. In *The Troublesome Reign* the accident occurs during

flight from the battlefield. Shakespeare's change sustains the idea of the Bastard's heroic leadership.

63 *Were*: Plural verb after singular subject; see [note to V.6.40](#).

64 *unexpected flood*: Suddenly incoming tide.

King John dies: F gives no direction for the King's death. For the sake of clarity one is added here, at the end of the Bastard's speech. As the vagueness of F suggests, however, the precise moment of John's death is unmarked. It seems appropriate that a king whose reign has been such a confused mixture should thus sink imperceptibly into death as bad news, which soon afterwards proves misleading, is being delivered.

68 *stay*: (1) Prop, support (security) or (2) endurance, continuance.

71 *do the office for thee of revenge*: Perform the duty of revenging you. The Bastard knows that John's murderer is already dead (V.6.30); it is from his enemies that he intends to exact vengeance – by pushing the war against the Dauphin to a successful conclusion.

72 *my soul shall wait on thee to heaven*: The Bastard, at least, assumes that John has achieved salvation (cf. 24 and 46–8 above).

73 *still*: Always.

74 *you stars that move in your right spheres*: The nobles, now back in their proper positions around the King, like the stars, which were thought to move in their spheres around the earth.

75 *Show now your mended faiths*: Now give a demonstration of how genuine your returned loyalty is.

77 *destruction and perpetual shame*: The invading French army.

81–95 *It seems you know not ... this business happily*: The preparations for peace have apparently gone on through the night, Pandulph arriving from the Dauphin only half an hour ago (83). The subdued frame of mind in which we last saw the Dauphin in V.5 (Shakespeare's deliberate change from his source) makes his willingness to negotiate reasonably plausible.

84 *offers of our peace*: Proposals to us for peace. In *The Troublesome Reign* it is the Dauphin's sense of powerlessness at the loss of his English allies which forces him to negotiate.

85 *respect*: Self-respect.

88 *well-sinewèd to our defence*: Strongly prepared to defend ourselves. The Bastard expressed a similar view to John at V.1.74–6.

90 *carriages*: Wagons, gun-carriages.

91–2 *put his cause and quarrel* | *To the disposing of the Cardinal*: Empowered the Cardinal to negotiate his case.

94 *If you think meet*: The man who has for some time been in virtual control of English affairs – and who has not yet declared his allegiance to the new king – is treated with proper respect.

94–5 *post* | *To consummate this business happily*: Hurry to bring this matter to a successful conclusion. Since Pandulph is fully empowered to negotiate, there seems no reason for their having physically to *post* (literally, to travel at speed, from stage to stage, on horseback) to the Dauphin to ratify the treaty, and the word may be used figuratively. But since *The Troublesome Reign* shows direct negotiation with Lewis this may be the sense that Shakespeare had in mind.

97, 115 *princes*: Nobles.

98 *wait upon your father's funeral*: Follow, in ceremonious escort, your father's funeral procession.

99–100 *At Worcester ... so he willed it*: Holinshed seems to be the direct source here: the chronicler writes that John was buried at Worcester, though he cannot say 'whether it was his *will* to be *interred*' there. *The Troublesome Reign* has the vaguer wording 'to Worcester let us bear the King, | And there inter his body as be seems' (II.1180–81). Shakespeare perhaps knew the tomb in Worcester Cathedral, with its splendid contemporary effigy of King John; Worcester is only twenty-five miles from Stratford, and it was there that Shakespeare had obtained his marriage licence in November 1581.

101 *happily*: With good fortune, propitiously.

102 *lineal state*: Monarchy rightfully inherited.

107 *rest without a spot*: Remain without a blemish (of disloyalty).

108 *I have a kind soul that would give thanks*: The line is one syllable short and is often padded out ('fain give thanks', 'give you thanks', etc.). But the long vowels of *kind soul* make this unnecessary, and a slightly irregular line may reflect the emotional tension in Prince Henry's voice.

kind: (1) Natural (and hence appropriately responsive) or (2) loving.

110–18 *O, let us pay ... If England to itself do rest but true*: The Bastard's concluding speech in *The Troublesome Reign* includes references to the details of the political situation in which it is delivered. Shakespeare omits these and develops four lines of the

source play into his more generalized, and much more effective, conclusion:

Let England live but true within itself,
And all the world can never wrong her state ...
If England's peers and people join in one,
Nor pope, nor France, nor Spain can do them wrong.

(II.1187–8, 1195–6)

Both plays leave history behind at the end, to confront their audiences with the stern political realities of their own world. But, as he has been throughout, Shakespeare is less partisan, less dogmatic, than his source.

110–11 *let us pay the time ... our griefs*: Let us mourn the present occasion no more than is necessary, for time has already exacted an advance tribute of grief from us (or, possibly, because time has prematurely ended our griefs – by the happy events of Prince Henry's accession and the French withdrawal). The final lines of the play are to be used, not for looking backward, but for looking forward – and out, into the world of reality.

115 *come home again*: Returned to their allegiance.

116 *three corners*: England, *that utmost corner of the west* (II.1.29), being the fourth.

117 *shock them*: Repel them with force, throw them into confusion.

118 *If England to itself do rest but true*: Shakespeare allows the fully positive note to sound clearly only at the close of the play. The Bastard, who has steered his honourable, sensible course through all the play's crises, can use it now with cheerfully assertive confidence.

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